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THE FACT OF CONVERSION

By
GEORGE JACKSON, B.A

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TO
THE MEMBERS OF
THE THEOLOGICAL FACULTY
VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
WHOSE GENEROUS CONFIDENCE INVITED
AND WHOSE SYMPATHY ENCOURAGED
THE DELIVERY OF THESE
LECTURES

PREFACE

THE six lectures contained in this volume were delivered, in the spring of this year, at Vanderbilt University, in response to the invitation of the Theological Faculty. In sending them forth to a larger public, it is unnecessary to add more than a brief word of introduction.

The book is addressed primarily to those who, like myself, are engaged in the practical work of the Christian Church. I have done my best to become acquainted with the literature of the subject, but the book remains still the message of a busy city pastor rather than the scientific treatise of a professional student.

The point of view from which the whole discussion proceeds can be stated very

simply. With all my heart I believe that, as the author of *Ecce Homo* says, the article of Conversion is the true *articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiæ*. But in theology we retain nothing that we cannot re-interpret. "We are not done with Conversion," says a writer in *The Expository Times*, whose words appeared after these Lectures were completed; "we never shall be done with it. *But we must tell our own generation what Conversion means.*" That is what this little book seeks to do.

Some readers may be disposed to complain of the frequency and length of the biographical illustrations of which I have made use. I cannot apologize for them; they were essential to my purpose. Facts and an interpretation are all that the book contains, all that it was ever designed to contain.

It only remains for me to acknowledge my indebtedness to my friend and former colleague, the Rev. E. J. Ives, who has

assisted me with many valuable suggestions, and to my wife, who has been in this, as in all my work, my unfailing helpmeet and adviser.

GEORGE JACKSON.

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THE REALITY OF CONVERSION, AS A FACT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

I

THE REALITY OF CONVERSION, AS A FACT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

"CHRISTIANITY," wrote Henry Drummond, now more than twenty years ago,[1] "is learning from science to go back to its facts." "There is, however," he went on, "one portion of this field of facts which is still strangely neglected, and to which a scientific theology may turn its next attention. The evidence for Christianity is not the Evidences. The evidence for Christianity is *a Christian*. The unit of physics is the atom, of biology the cell, of philosophy the man, of theology the Christian. The natural man, his regenera-

[1] In an essay entitled "The Contribution of Science to Christianity," *Expositor*, third series, vol. i.

tion by the Holy Spirit, the spiritual man and his relations to the world and to God, these are the modern facts for a scientific theology. We may indeed talk with science on its own terms about the creation of the world, and the spirituality of nature, and the force behind nature, and the unseen universe; but our language is not less scientific, not less justified by fact, when we speak of the work of the risen Christ and the contemporary activities of the Holy Ghost, and the facts of regeneration, and the powers which are freeing men from sin. There is a great experiment which is repeated every day, the evidence for which is as accessible as for any fact of science; its phenomena are as palpable as any in nature, its processes are as explicable, or as inexplicable; its purpose is as clear; and yet science has never been seriously asked to reckon with it, nor has theology ever granted it the place its impressive reality commands. One aim of a scientific theology

will be to study *conversion*, and restore to Christianity its most powerful witness.'

I know no words with which more fitly to introduce the subject of this brief course of lectures. It is not—in the sense at least in which the term is commonly employed—a theological discussion on which we are about to enter, but an inquiry into certain indubitable facts of the religious life. It may be true, as we are repeatedly told, that men to-day do not care for theology; but however impatient it may be of dogma, an age which boasts of its hunger and thirst after fact will surely not refuse a hearing to the facts of the religious consciousness.

It is, I hope, possible to enter on an inquiry of this nature without exposing oneself to unpleasant suspicions. I shall have much to say throughout these lectures about conversion experiences, but I must not therefore be understood as claiming for those Churches which are wont to lay greater em-

phasis on such experiences a higher rank than others in the spiritual order; it is the reality of the experiences themselves which is our present sole concern. And if sometimes I seem to some to speak rather the dialect of a province than the common speech of the kingdom, I can but reply that this dialect, if such it be, is the spiritual mother tongue of multitudes who daily speak in it the mighty works of God. Neither must anything in these lectures be construed as putting forward in behalf of one type of experience a claim to spiritual validity and worth which is denied to others which do not readily conform to it. Our single aim will be to do justice to an immense group of spiritual phenomena, which are among the most real things in Christian history or human experience.

Let us begin, then, with an honest attempt to gain an adequate impression of the range and reality of the phenomena under consideration. For some of us, it may be, this

will be no easy task. The subject belongs to a realm in which our minds do not move freely, in which we feel ourselves aliens, unsympathetic and, it may be, antagonistic. When we hear of conversions we think immediately of revivals and the clatter of a machinery which always jars upon our nerves; to us revivalism is but another name for hysteria and unwholesome excitement. And even the literature of spiritual autobiography—the most indispensable of all data for a subject such as this—is to some of us utterly distasteful. We shrink from these soul anatomies as we shrink from the revelations of the scalpel and the dissecting-room. I do not stay to discuss the reasonableness or otherwise of this attitude of mind; I only wish to point out that so long as we persist in it we put ourselves out of court in an inquiry like the present. "The first thing to bear in mind," as Professor James bluntly puts it, "is that nothing can be more stupid than to bar out phenomena from our notice,

merely because we are incapable of taking part in anything like them ourselves." [1]

The religious inquirer, like the scientific inquirer, must lay aside his prejudices; he must, as Professor Huxley once said, sit down before fact as a little child, prepared to give up every preconceived notion and follow humbly wherever it may lead him.

The fact of conversion may be studied in two different ways: in itself, or in its practical results; as a fact of consciousness, or as a fact for life. Reserving for the following lecture what has to be said concerning the fruits of conversion, it will be our aim now to bring together some of the testimonies to the reality of conversion as these are written in the records of the religious consciousness.

[1] *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 109.

I

And at once there opens before us a field of vast and varied interest. How vast and varied the field is perhaps no one realizes who has not made some attempt to survey and map it out. Most people know something of the great spiritual transformations associated with the names of St. Paul and St. Augustine, of John Bunyan and John Wesley; but how many of us have made any effort seriously to estimate the significance of that great mass of veritable human documents to be found in the New Testament, in the records of great religious awakenings like that in America under Jonathan Edwards, or that in England under Wesley and Whitefield, and above all in the biographies and autobiographies, the hymns and prayers and confessions, of religious men and women

of all Churches and in all ages? Whatever else may be said about Professor James' much-discussed Gifford Lectures, they had at least this merit, that by the concrete examples with which they were so liberally loaded they gave to many readers a new sense of the extent and reality of the world of religious experience. This is the world which we now seek to enter. It is for us to observe, to collect, to group, to interpret whatever facts are available for our purpose. Is there testimony adequate to establish the reality of those various experiences—deliverance from the sense of guilt, deliverance from the power of evil habit, the joyful assurance of the favour of God—which are included within the term conversion? The answer may be given for convenience sake in fourfold form.

(1) We turn first to the New Testament and to the conversion of St. Paul. There is no necessity to speculate about the mechanism of this great experience. As Principal Rainy

says,[1] it is vain for us to inquire by what means the form of Christ and the words of Christ reached the consciousness of Paul. One thing is plain: Paul saw the Lord, he heard the Lord, he spoke with the Lord; through all his after life his certainty of these things never wavered; and behind this it is not possible for us to go. But whatever may be our explanation, the experience itself remains, and its profound significance both for the Apostle and the world. We may say if we choose, with Matthew Arnold, that "Paul's conversion is for science an event of precisely the same nature as the conversions of which the history of Methodism relates so many"; [2] but surely Paul's conversion has also "for science" this further significance that, next to the Death and Resurrection of our Lord, it is the most momentous event in Christian

[1] Lecture on St. Paul in *The Evangelical Succession*, vol. i., p. 18.

[2] *St. Paul and Protestantism*, p. 36.

history. How the Apostle himself thought of it his own writings make abundantly plain. *It was the good pleasure of God to reveal His Son in me*; thus and thus only did Paul the persecutor become Paul the Apostle. *I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; howbeit I obtained mercy*: this is the testimony in every epistle. That which happened to St. Paul on the road to Damascus was no mere incident in the development of his spiritual experience; it was a rending revolution which made all things new, the origin and explanation of all that followed it.

Nor is St. Paul our only New Testament witness to the reality of conversion. I shall have occasion in a later lecture to speak of the varieties of religious experience which are revealed in the earliest manifestations of Christian life; but, striking and instructive as these varieties are, there is underlying them all a unity of consciousness which is one of the most impressive things in the

literature of the New Testament. Open the apostolic writings where we will, we find ourselves everywhere in the presence of a life thrilling through its every fibre with the joy of a great deliverance; bearing itself proudly yet humbly, because conscious of strange new powers, its own, yet not its own, but Another's; uttering itself, too, in speech that, like itself, was new and strange, and yet withal, too feeble for the task committed to it. The new life did not come to all who believed in Christ in the same way, but to all it came, and when it came, so poor and mean in its presence did all other distinctions seem, that they who received it were as brethren.

There is, perhaps, no truer index of the depth and strength of the New Testament consciousness of salvation than is to be found in the rich and varied phraseology through which it seeks expression. If any man is in Christ—so do all the Apostles bear witness—for him all life is become nobly new. The soul passes into a new kingdom, and

owes allegiance to a new lord; it is delivered out of the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the Son of God's love; it is no longer subject to the lusts of man but to the will of God. Nay, more than that, if any man is in Christ, he is passed from death unto life, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; he is born again, begotten of God, born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God; the man he was, "the old man," has ceased to be, and in his stead has arisen "the new man," created in righteousness and holiness of truth. In one word, *if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things are passed away; behold they are become new.*[1] Now all this is not to be dismissed as the language of poetry or rhetoric; it is the speech of men in contact with reality, who speak what

[1] Col. i. 13; 1 Peter iv. 2; 1 John iii. 14; 1 Peter ii. 24; 1 John iii. 9; John i. 13; Eph. iv. 22, 24; 2 Cor. v. 17.

they do know and bear witness of that they have seen; and it is surely a reasonable thing to ask of thought which aspires to be scientific that it shall take these things into its reckoning.

(2) We turn from the Church of the first days to the Church of the centuries. And if after ages have witnessed nothing quite like that which Ephesus and Rome and Corinth saw; if there has been no second Paul to cleave a lane of light through the world's darkness; if the gold has become dim, and the silver dross, and the wine mixed with water; yet, on the other hand, there has never been a time when men had no experiences of their own out of which to interpret the deep things of the New Testament; there has never been a time when Drummond's words concerning "the contemporary activities of the Holy Ghost, and the facts of regeneration, and the powers which are freeing men from sin," had not a meaning in them. The phenomena with

which these lectures deal belong not to one century only but to all the centuries of Christian history.

Let me touch for a moment—and alas! a paragraph must serve where a lecture would be insufficient—upon the witness to conversion of the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs of the Church. It is a curious fact which has often been commented on, that our best hymns maintain their place in the worship of the Church, wholly irrespective either of the theological position of their authors, or the changing fashions of religious thought. For every ten persons who now read John Wesley's *Sermons* or *Notes on the New Testament* there are probably ten thousand who sing Charles Wesley's hymns. Toplady's controversial writings, which once made so great a noise in the world, have long since fallen on sleep; but "Rock of Ages" is secure of immortality. Style, it is said, is the great antiseptic, yet even Newman's winning style will not

preserve for our children more than a very few of the many volumes of the great Oxford scholar; but will "Lead Kindly Light" ever be forgotten? What is the explanation of facts like these? It is certainly not to be found in any perfection of literary form. There are some hymns indeed, such, e.g., as Cowper's

> There is a fountain filled with blood
> Drawn from Immanuel's veins;

or John Wesley's translation of Rothe's

> Now I have found the ground wherein
> Sure my soul's anchor may remain—
> The wounds of Jesus,

which, despite the harsh or incongruous metaphors with which they are disfigured, still keep their place from generation to generation.[1] What then is the explanation? Surely it is that such hymns are the direct and spontaneous expression of experience. "They are," as one writer says, "but one

[1] "A distinguished critic of our times, in his professorial chair, is reported one day to have held out in one hand *The Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics*,

degree removed from the concrete fact."[1] And the reason why intelligent Christian congregations to-day do not tire of singing

> I heard the voice of Jesus say,
> Come unto Me and rest;

or,

> O happy day that fixed my choice
> On Thee, my Saviour and my God!

is simply because they have themselves shared in the experience out of which the song arose, and still find in it adequate and satisfying expression of the great spiritual realities of which they are conscious.

(3) It is, however, in the field of Christian biography that the richest results await the

collected by Francis Palgrave, and in the other *The Book of Praise*, collected from all English hymnody, by Lord Selborne, and to have asked, 'Why is it that *The Golden Treasury* contains almost nothing that is bad, and why is it that *The Book of Praise* contains almost nothing that is good?'" (Dean Stanley in *The English Poets*, edited by T. H. Ward, vol. iii. p. 255.) The "distinguished critic's" judgment is far too sweeping, but there is sufficient truth in it to justify the statement made above.

[1] *The Religion of a Mature Mind*, by G. A. Coe, p. 65.

student of conversion. Indeed, I am embarrassed by the very abundance of the material available. At most I can but present a mere handful of illustrations, and the problem is so to select these that they shall suggest to others the wealth and fertility of the goodly land from which they are gathered. For the present I omit altogether any references to the familiar cases of St. Augustine, Luther, Bunyan, Wesley and Chalmers; and I do so not because these are not wholly relevant to our discussion—indeed the mere mention of such names is sufficient to show the significance to Christian history of the fact of conversion—but because over-exclusive attention to the evidence of a few outstanding witnesses may conceal the range and variety of the testimony by which in the long-run judgment must be determined. In the examples which I adduce I shall leave the witness, whenever possible, to tell his story in his own way and in his own words.

I begin with John Donne, the poet preacher of St. Paul's, the story of whose life has been told in one of the gem-like biographies of Izaak Walton. Donne's career has been often compared with that of St. Augustine. There was in him, says Trench, "the same tumultuous youth, the same entanglement in youthful lusts, the same conflict with these and the same final deliverance from them; and then the same passionate and personal grasp of the central truths of Christianity, linking itself, as this did, with all that he had suffered and all that he had sinned, and all through which, by God's grace, he had victoriously struggled." How or when the great change took place we do not know, but the change itself is there for all men to see. "It was therefore no pious platitude, no barren truism, no phrase of conventional orthodoxy, but the profound conviction of a sinful, sorrowing, forgiven, thanksgiving man, when he speaks of 'the sovereign balm of our souls, the blood of

Christ Jesus.' "[1] For the rest it is enough to quote some lines of his own, written in later years on a sick-bed:

Wilt Thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin, through which I run
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done;
For I have more.

Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I have won
Others to sin, and made my sins their door?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two, but wallowed in a score?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done;
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by Thyself, that at my death Thy Son
Shall shine, as He shines now and heretofore;
And having done that, Thou hast done;
I fear no more.

John Donne passed away when the fires of the Great Rebellion were smouldering throughout England. During the Puritan period which followed our conversion re-

[1] Lightfoot's *Historical Essays*, to which I am also indebted for the quotation from Archbishop Trench.

cords steadily increase. We may take as thoroughly typical that of the great Protector, Oliver Cromwell himself. "It is in these years undated by history"—writes Carlyle under the date 1623—"that we must place Oliver's clear recognition of Calvinistic Christianity; what he, with unspeakable joy, would name his conversion; his deliverance from the jaws of eternal death. Certainly a grand epoch for a man: properly the one epoch; the turning-point which guides upwards, or guides downwards him and his activity for evermore." The circumstances of the crisis are unknown to us, but the character and reality of it are writ large, both in Cromwell's public and private life, and in well-known words of his own in which long afterwards he made reference to it: "You know what my manner of life hath been. Oh, I lived in and loved darkness, and hated light; I was a chief, the chief of sinners. This is true: I hated godliness, yet God had mercy on me. O the

richness of His mercy ! " It is surely significant of much that at the very root of all that Cromwell did for England and for England's civil and religious liberties, there lies this great experience in his personal history—his consciousness of sin and of the forgiving mercy of God.

From the seventeenth I turn to the eighteenth century, and to the great days of the Evangelical Revival. And now our documents multiply fast. Here is one from that great arsenal of facts, *The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers.* Sampson Staniforth was a Methodist soldier in the campaign of Fontenoy, and tells his conversion in words which, as Matthew Arnold says, bear plainly marked on them the very stamp of good faith :

" From twelve at night till two it was my turn to stand sentinel at a dangerous post. I had a fellow-sentinel, but I desired him to go away, which he willingly did. As soon as I was alone I kneeled down and deter-

mined not to rise, but to continue crying and wrestling with God till He had mercy on me. How long I was in that agony I cannot tell; but as I looked up to Heaven, I saw the clouds open exceeding bright and I saw Jesus hanging on the Cross. At the same moment these words were applied to my heart, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.' My chains fell off; my heart was free. All guilt was gone and my soul was filled with unutterable peace. I loved God and all mankind, and the fear of death and hell was vanished away. I was filled with wonder and astonishment. I then closed my eyes, but the impression was still the same. And for about ten weeks while I was awake, let me be where I would, the same appearance was still before my eyes and the same impression upon my heart, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.'" [1]

It is a far cry from Sampson Staniforth

[1] *The Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. iv. p. 22. It is perhaps worth mentioning that Dr. Joseph Parker used to read these simple little unpretentious

and the battlefields of the Low Countries to William Cowper and the quiet lanes of Buckinghamshire. But the gentle poet of Olney has his place among these records no less than the plain soldier. And in the poet's case we are fortunate in possessing two accounts of his conversion, one in prose, the other in verse, and both from his own pen. I quote them both without comment.

"I flung myself into a chair near the window and seeing a Bible there ventured once more to apply to it for comfort and instruction. The first verse I saw was the twenty-fifth of the third chapter of Romans: 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God.' Immediately I received strength to believe, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteous-

biographies on Saturday evenings as the best preparation for the work of the coming day.

Matthew Arnold's reference to Staniforth will be found in his essay, *St. Paul and Protestantism.*

ness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood and all the fulness and completeness of His justification. In a moment I believed and received the Gospel. . . . Unless the Almighty arm had been under me I think I should have died with gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears and my voice choked with transport. I could only look up to heaven in silent fear, overwhelmed with love and wonder. . . . For many succeeding weeks tears were ready to flow if I did but speak of the gospel or mention the name of Jesus. To rejoice day and night was all my employment. Too happy to sleep much I thought it was lost time that was spent in slumber."

And now here is the same story set to the moving music of *The Task:*

"I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since: with many an arrow deep infixed
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by One who had Himself

Been hurt by the archers. In His side He bore,
And in His hands and feet, the cruel scars.
With gentle force soliciting the darts,
He drew them forth and healed and bade me live." [1]

With the name of William Cowper is inseparably associated that of John Newton. Newton's own thrilling story I am compelled reluctantly to pass over; [2] but linked with it are two other names which well deserve a place in this brief chronicle. It was—as every reader of the *Force of Truth* will remember—mainly to Newton that Thomas Scott, whose famous *Commentary* was once to be

[1] See T. Wright's *Life of W. Cowper*, and also an admirable article by the late Arthur Moorhouse in the *London Quarterly Review*, April, 1900. "However obsolete," says Mr. Goldwin Smith, "Cowper's belief, and the language in which he expresses it, may have become for many of us, we must take it as his philosophy of life." Undoubtedly we must.

[2] His striking autobiographical poem beginning "In evil long I took delight," should not be overlooked by those in search of conversion documents. As Professor Palgrave (who includes it in his *Treasury of Sacred Song*) truly says, its bare simplicity and sincerity suffice to range it among the most powerful hymns in our language; John Bunyan might have been proud or thankful to own it.

found in all the households of the pious, owed his own soul. Eighty or ninety years went by, and then (in 1864) we find John Henry Newman making acknowledgment in his *Apologia* of a like indebtedness to Scott. "The writer," he says, speaking of his early years, "who made a deeper impression on my mind than any other, and to whom (humanly speaking) I almost owe my soul," was "Thomas Scott of Aston Sandford." Indeed, Newman's language concerning his conversion could hardly have been more explicit had his place been in the great Evangelical Succession. On the same page of the *Apologia* as that from which I have just quoted he declares that the "outward conversion" of which as a lad of fifteen he was conscious, he is still more certain of than that he has hands and feet. Nor did his language on the subject ever change. As late as 1885 we find him writing: "Of course I cannot myself be the judge of myself; but speaking with this reserve, I should say that it is diffi-

cult to realize or imagine the identity of the boy before and after August, 1816. . . . I can look back at the end of seventy years as if on another person." [1]

Thus far our illustrations have all been drawn from the past. Will the records fail us when we come to the life of to-day? "Election, conversion, day of grace, coming to Christ," writes Mr. Froude, "have been pawed and fingered by unctuous hands for now two hundred years. The bloom is gone from the flower. The plumage, once shining with hues direct from heaven, is soiled and bedraggled. The most solemn of all realities have been degraded into the passwords of technical theology." [2] Is it really so? Or is this simply the language of a man who is writing with his eye off the facts? It would, I think, be a legitimate answer to the critic who roundly asserts that conversions have

[1] *Letters and Correspondence of J. H. Newman*, edited by Anne Mozley, vol. i. p. 22.

[2] *Bunyan*, English Men of Letters Series, p. 34.

ceased, to bid him examine for himself the results of such a work as is being carried on to-day in England by the great Manchester Mission. We might also put in as an entirely relevant bit of evidence the mass of facts contained in such a book as *Down in Water Street*, by Samuel H. Hadley, of the old Jerry McAuley Mission in New York.[1] It seems best, however, to keep to the track which has thus far been followed, and to illustrate the present-day witness to conversion from contemporary biography.

In 1889 the late revered Professor Franz Delitzsch of Leipsic, published a remarkable "Last Confession of Faith" from which I take the following words:

[1] Cp. the simple testimony of a Lancashire drunkard quoted in Professor W. T. Davison's *Christian Interpretation of Life*: "Religion has changed my home, my heart, and you can all see it has even changed my face. I hear some of these London men call themselves Positivists. Bless God, I am a Positivist. I'm positive God, for Christ's sake, has pardoned my sins, changed my heart, and made me a new creature."

"The subjectivity of science finds a wholesome check in the office of a preacher and guardian of souls . . . In the Muldenthal I was, as a young man, a witness of soul-struggles and spiritual victories, which rendered distasteful to me for ever the over-estimation of science. Still does my spiritual life find its root in the miraculous soil of the first love which I experienced with Lehmann Zöpffel, Ferdinand Walther, and Bürger; still to me is the reality of miracles sealed by the miracles of grace which I saw with my own eyes in the congregations of this blessed valley. And the faith which I professed in my first sermons, which I could maintain in Niederfrohna and Lunzenau, remains mine to-day, undiminished in strength and immeasurably higher than all earthly knowledge." [1]

Even more striking, perhaps, was the story of his own conversion, told recently to the young men in his theological class-room, by a

[1] *The Expositor*, third series, vol. ix.

young Swiss professor—the late Gaston Frommel. One of his courses on the History of Dogma had led some of the students at Geneva to regard Christianity as a mere product of evolution. To correct this misapprehension he judged it necessary to offer a "frank explanation": "To the question, How do you succeed in maintaining the affirmations of your religious consciousness over against the frequently contrary affirmations of science? . . . the reply is easy. My religious consciousness, in its sources and its contents, is *independent* of my scientific consciousness. And I add that, in my own case, it was a long way *anterior*. I was a Christian before I was a theologian: I did not become a Christian because I was a theologian: I became a theologian because I was a Christian." Then he described the crisis in his spiritual history and the result: "That day now lies a long way behind me in the past; but it shines there as the day of a new birth. And, in

fact, all things thenceforward became new to me. Doubtless, alas! there have since been many failures, many defects on my part, many interruptions of my consecration, many breaches of Christian fidelity, many faults and those very culpable. They have not effaced the fact that I belonged to Christ. It was but a first starting-point which needed to be followed by many others. But it was a starting-point. For that which Christ then became for me He has been ever since. The assurance of forgiveness, the certainty of salvation, the inward witness of His grace, He has faithfully bestowed day after day. They are the strength of my life and the sole reason of my ministry." [1]

It may, perhaps, be urged that both these, and indeed most of my examples, are drawn from the inner circle of ecclesiastical influence. Without for a moment admitting the validity of the objection, I will meet it so far as to

[1] I am indebted for this delightful incident to a writer in the *Expository Times*, December, 1907.

look elsewhere for my four final examples.

In the life story of Adeline Countess Schimmelmann—published in England in 1896—that distinguished German lady gives an account of her conversion. After weeks of darkness and uncertainty, she seemed, she says, to hear God saying to her: "My child, thy salvation does not depend upon thy love to Me, but upon My love to thee, just as thou art." "Then," she says, "broke in upon my heart a sun of joy in the beams of which I still rejoice, and whose light will shine upon me eternally. Now my cold heart began to burn, not on account of my love to Christ, but because of His love to me."

This is how the same event is described in Mr. Frank T. Bullen's delightful autobiography *With Christ at Sea*: "There was no extravagant joy, no glorious bursting into light and liberty such as I have since read about as happening on such occasions; it was just a lesson learned, the satisfaction consequent upon finding one's way after long grop-

ing in darkness and misery—a way that led to peace. I love that description of conversion as the 'new birth.' No other definition touches the truth of the process at all, so helpless, so utterly knowledgeless, possessing nothing but the consciousness of life just began, is the new-born Christian."

In a little pamphlet written on the Welsh Revival of a few years ago, Mr. W. T. Stead, the well-known journalist, describes in detail a definite religious experience through which he passed when a schoolboy twelve years of age. Then came these words:

"Whatever may be the objective reality of the altered relations which I then recognized as existing between my soul and its Maker, there is absolutely no question as to the abiding nature of the change it effected in my life. It is forty-three years since that Revival at school. The whole of my life during all these forty-three years has been influenced by the change which men call conversion which occurred with me when I was twelve. My

views as to many things have naturally broadened much in these forty-three years. But that was the conscious starting-point of everything that there has been in my life of good or of service for my fellow-creatures. . . . My life has been flawed with many failures, darkened with many sins, but the thing in it which was good, which has enabled me to resist temptations to which I would otherwise have succumbed, to bear burdens which would otherwise have crushed me with their weight and which has kept the soul within me ever joyfully conscious that, despite all appearances to the contrary, this is God's world, and that He and I are fellow-workers in the work of its renovation—that potent thing, whatever you may call it, and however you may explain it, came into my life then, and abides with me to this hour;—my one incentive and inspiration in this life; my sole hope for that which is to come."

And now to these confessions of a journalist, a seaman, and a countess, let me add the un-

forgettable testimony of James Smetham, artist and letter-writer :

" Whatever I have studied of them,"—he writes, speaking of the epistles of St. Paul —" and this has been for many years, and with as much yearning eagerness and breathless awe as I have felt in nothing except the words of the Lord Jesus, has tended to the confirmation of the old evangelic interpretation of them, in which, perhaps, I should not have seen my way so clearly but for their accordance with my own experience. All that unutterable sense of sin, that terrible deadly fight with evil, those strivings of the Spirit I went through, and more ; all that deliverance, that liberty of the gospel, that being justified by faith in Christ, that peace with God, that shedding abroad by the Holy Ghost of the love of God in the heart, that coming in of the ' new creation ' ; all the shades and lights of experience since then. Twenty-three years of such experience, which inwardly is as great and as simple a fact as the

facts of seeing and hearing, make me unable to receive, even to perceive, any other interpretation. And I have met with such scores and hundreds who strike hands with me in life and death on these great matters that it is settled 'without controversy' to me." [1]

(4) I have lingered, it may be thought unnecessarily long, over these personal testimonies. But I have done so advisedly because I know of no other way, except the multiplication of concrete examples, by which the strength of the case for the reality of conversion as a fact of consciousness can be brought home to us. And yet, be it remembered, the recorded cases, of which I have given a few illustrations, are but a tiny fragment of the whole. Whenever a great wave of spiritual power—such, e.g., as we associate with the names of Edwards, and Wesley, and Moody, and Evan Roberts—has passed over a people, it is always easy to find traces of its influence in the records of national biography.

[1] *Letters of James Smetham*, p. 203.

But behind these whose voices reach us, is a great host of silent witnesses whose faces no man can remember, but whose consciousness of " the powers that are freeing men from sin " is no whit less real. Let me illustrate what I mean. When Moody and Sankey were conducting their wonderful mission in Great Britain and Ireland in 1873–5—a Mission by which Professor George Adam Smith once declared our people were stirred as they had not been since the days of Wesley and Whitefield —one of the cities which they visited was Birmingham, where the late Dr. Dale was then exercising his ministry. Now Dale was, of all men, the least likely to be swept off his feet by a wave of mere religious excitement ; yet this is how he describes what he saw : " I had seen occasional instances before of instant transition from religious anxiety to the clear and triumphant consciousness of restoration to God ; but what struck me in the gallery of Bingley Hall was the fact that this instant transition took place with nearly

every person with whom I talked. They had come up into the gallery anxious, restless, feeling after God in the darkness, and when after a conversation of a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, they went away, their faces were filled with light and they left me not only at peace with God but filled with joy. I have seen the sun rise from the top of Helvellyn and the top of the Righi, and there is something very glorious in it; but to see the light of heaven suddenly strike on man after man in the course of one evening is very much more thrilling." [1] It is men and women such as these of whom I am thinking when I speak of the great host of silent witnesses to the fact of conversion. They are to be found in all our Churches; every minister knows of them; and their real, if unrecorded, testimony is not the least part of the case which Christianity presents to science for inquiry and for judgment.

[1] *The Congregationalist*, March, 1875.

II

This hasty survey of a part of the wide field which lies open to our observation will have prepared the way for two or three very brief generalizations. It is patent, I hope, by this time, even to the most prejudiced, that we are dealing with facts neither few nor obscure. They are peculiar to no period; they are bound up with no artificially stimulated conditions; only wilful ignorance could suggest that they are the offspring of youth, or poverty, or superstition. When the late Professor Romanes was slowly feeling his way back to the Christian faith and fold, it was—with a scientist's instinct for facts—upon the significance of these things that he laid his finger: "Saint Augustine after thirty years of age, and other Fathers," he says, "bear testimony to a sudden, enduring and extraordinary change in themselves, called *conversion*. Now

this experience," he goes on, "has been repeated and testified to by countless millions of civilized men and women in all nations and all degrees of culture." [1]

It may further be observed that, vast as is the multitude of witnesses which we have summoned, their testimony is essentially one. If we can imagine them closeted in conference, though in nothing else they could agree, they would speak with a single voice of their debt to Christ, and to the divine grace which has redeemed them. Nor does this unity mean that the multitude is simply the echo of its leaders. Professor James may be claimed as an impartial witness, and he declares unhesitatingly that, whatever part suggestion and imitation may have played in producing conversion experiences in men and women in excited assemblies, "they have at any rate been in countless individual instances an original and unborrowed experience." [2]

[1] *Thoughts on Religion*, by the late G. J. Romanes, p. 162.

[2] *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 229.

The hysteria, the strange "bodily effects," the general emotional extravagances, by which conversion has sometimes been attended, may for our present purpose be wholly disregarded. If we like to use the psychological jargon of the hour, we shall I suppose ascribe them to "the subject's having a large subliminal region"; if we are wise perhaps we shall not greatly concern ourselves about them at all; but however we explain them, they have, as Professor James says, no essential spiritual significance. Their presence may make his conversion more memorable to the convert, but they are neither a proof of its reality, nor a guarantee of its stability. On the other hand, they must not be suffered to discredit the spiritual realities of which they are the occasional accessory. They are in their very nature evanescent; the one thing that matters is what remains when they are gone.[1]

[1] The sanity of great evangelistic leaders in this matter is deserving of note. Mr. Moody, says Professor G. A. Smith, suffered no fools, and every

And, finally, conversions have not ceased. The things of which I have spoken in this lecture are very old; but they are also very new. The experience which is written in the New Testament, and in the lives of the saints of sixty generations, is still being repeated in our midst. Our witnesses are not of yesterday only, but of to-day, of this day. Our facts are not merely fossils dug from a dead past; they are facts of the present, warm, fresh, living.

symptom of the hysteria which often breaks out in such movements was promptly suppressed. Dr. Dale notes the same fact. Professor Coe, writing of the strange "psychic manifestations" which sometimes followed the preaching of Wesley, says that perhaps nothing in his career more clearly reveals his marvellous practical capacity than his calm and, for the most part, common-sense treatment of such occurrences; he had the wisdom to perceive that these apparently divine or demoniac possessions were matters aside from his main business (*The Spiritual Life*, p. 141). Of his brother Charles it is said that on one occasion he notified his congregation that any one who was convulsed should be carried out, and that the notice ensured perfect quiet.

III

What then shall we say to these things? One thing we must say, and must keep on saying, and that is that they must be reckoned with. It is indeed a marvellous thing that science should concern itself about coral insects and climbing plants, and yet should take no thought for the facts of religious experience. It would be incredible, if it were not true, that we still have assailants and critics of Christianity in our midst for whom the religious consciousness simply does not exist; they discuss what they think the claims of Christianity and pronounce judgment against it, but the chief witness is never called. Such grotesque travesties of justice ought in the future to be laughed

out of court. Happily, there are signs of the coming of a better day. It is good to be told by a competent authority that "the natural history of the religious consciousness as it manifests itself in the life of the individual has now taken its place among the sciences."[1] We may not always be able to acquiesce in the findings of students of the psychology of religion, such as James, and Starbuck and Coe, but they have at least set a good example to their fellow-scientists throughout the world by their serious handling of the phenomena of the religious life. The sacredness of fact is perhaps the supreme lesson which modern science has impressed upon the mind of this generation; and at last science is beginning to learn its own lesson and to recognize that religion also has its facts, and that a soul's consciousness of the forgiveness of God

[1] Professor W. R. Inge, in a paper entitled "Ancient Faith and Modern Thought: Gains from Modern Psychology," read at the Church Congress, Yarmouth, 1907.

and of fellowship with Christ is just as worthy of our patient regard as the conformation of a beetle or the doings of an earth-worm.

THE REALITY OF CONVERSION, AS A FACT FOR LIFE

II

THE REALITY OF CONVERSION, AS A FACT FOR LIFE

THE fact of conversion, it was stated in the previous lecture, may be studied in two different ways: in itself, or in its practical results; as a fact of consciousness, or as a fact for life. It is this latter aspect of the subject to which we must now turn our attention.

And immediately we are on ground from which the modern mind is most easily accessible, for we are all "pragmatists" now, and perhaps a little inordinately vain of the fact. We may have our doubts about revivals, we may not find the lives of the saints very appetizing fare, but we do believe

in goodness and are not disposed to be hypercritical of anything that really makes for it. "What matter," Browning asks,

> "What matter though I doubt at every pore—
> Head-doubts, heart-doubts, doubts at my fingers' ends,
> Doubts in the trivial work of every day,
> Doubts at the very bases of my soul
> In the grand moments when she probes herself—
> If finally I have a life to show?"

Every heart vibrates to that string. The question of questions for many of us to-day is not so much "Is it true?" but, "Supposing it to be true what is it good for? what difference will it make if a man believe it?" And if the answer be that neither if a man believes is he the better, nor if he believes not is he the worse, straightway our interest is at an end. It is not my business just now to discuss this temper of mind; I only note it and go on to observe that in the matter of conversion we may accept this test of utility with all joy. "In the absence of the heavenly quality in the life," says Pro-

fessor Coe,[1] "no experience of internal wonders is valid evidence of the birth from above. . . . The new heart is to be defined by its quality not by its history." Unquestionably. "The roots of a man's virtue are inaccessible to us. No appearances whatever are infallible proofs of grace. Our practice is the only sure evidence that we are genuinely Christians."[2] This is the criterion of a modern philosopher; but it is also the criterion of the New Testament. In religion it is never the mechanism of a process, but always the ultimate meaning of the process, which is the really significant thing.

[1] *The Religion of a Mature Mind*, pp. 208–210.

[2] *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 20. "*Immediate luminousness, philosophical reasonableness* and *moral helpfulness*," says the same vigorous writer, "are the only available criteria. Saint Teresa might have had the nervous system of the placidest cow, and it would not now save her theology if the trial of the theology by those other tests should show it to be contemptible. And, conversely, if her theology can stand those other tests, it will make no difference how hysterical or nervously off her balance Saint Teresa may have been when she was with us here below."

The value of conversion—let it be said with all possible plainness—depends not on how it happens, but on what it effects. If finally it "have a life to show," there is no further need of argument; it has justified itself.

In applying this practical-utility test we must endeavour to state the question with perfect fairness. It may be said that religious experiences which have little or nothing in common with those described in the previous lecture, nevertheless yield results which will bear comparison with the best that these can show. This is of course true—and I may remind you of the emphatic repudiation which has already been made of any claim to spiritual superiority for one particular type of experience[1]—but it is not to the point. The question is not whether some other kind of experience bears good fruit, but whether this kind bears it; if it does, the reality of conversion as a fact for life is established; it has absolute value;

[1] See p. 6.

what may be its relative value is another question.

If it bears fruit, I say ; but does it ? This is the question to which we must now turn our attention.

I

As in the preceding lecture, so in this, the appeal will be to fact, and I shall not hesitate once more to make very liberal use of concrete illustrations. But before coming to these we may spend a minute or two in listening to the testimony of two or three witnesses whom no one will suspect of undue bias in favour of evangelical Christianity.

I have already quoted some significant words of the late Professor Romanes concerning conversion;[1] but the most significant are still to come: "In all cases," he says, "it is not a mere change of belief or opinion; this is by no means the point; the point is that it is a modification of character more or less profound."

Professor James is even more explicit:

[1] See p. 41.

"The best fruits of religious experience," he declares, "are the best things that history has to show. . . . And to call to mind a succession of such examples as I have lately had to wander through [in preparation for his lectures, i.e.] is to feel encouraged and uplifted and washed in better moral air." [1]

George Eliot's pen was not usually overflowing with generosity when she wrote about Evangelicalism; too often, indeed, it was dipped in gall. But there were things in the religious world about her which even she could not refuse to see, as her sketch of Milby society will show:

"Whatever might be the weaknesses of the ladies who pruned the luxuriances of their lace and ribbons, cut out garments for the poor, distributed tracts, quoted Scripture, and defined the true Gospel, they had learned this—that there was a divine work to be done in life, a rule of goodness higher than the opinion of their neighbours; and

[1] *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 259.

if the notion of a heaven in reserve for themselves was a little too prominent, yet the theory of fitness for that heaven consisted in purity of heart, in Christ-like compassion, in the subduing of selfish desires. They might give the name of piety to much that was only puritanic egoism; they might call many things sin that were not sin; but they had at least the feeling that sin was to be avoided and resisted, and colour blindness, which may mistake drab for scarlet, is better than total blindness, which sees no distinction of colour at all. Miss Rebecca Linnet, in quiet attire, with a somewhat excessive solemnity of countenance, teaching at the Sunday-school, visiting the poor, and striving after a standard of purity and goodness, had surely more moral loveliness than in those flaunting peony-days, when she had no other model than the costumes of the heroines in the circulating library. Miss Eliza Pratt, listening in rapt attention to Mr. Tryan's evening lecture, no doubt found evangelical

channels for vanity and egoism; but she was clearly in advance of Miss Phipps giggling under her feathers at old Mr. Crewe's peculiarities of enunciation. And even elderly fathers and mothers, with minds, like Mrs. Linnet's, too tough to imbibe much doctrine, were the better for having their hearts inclined towards the new preacher as a messenger from God. They became ashamed, perhaps, of their evil tempers, ashamed of their worldliness, ashamed of their trivial, futile past. The first condition of human goodness is something to love; the second something to reverence. And this latter precious gift was brought to Milby by Mr. Tryan and Evangelicalism."[1]

"I can assure my incredulous literary friends," writes that great master of English prose, Mark Rutherford, "that years ago it was not uncommon for men and women suddenly to awake to the fact that they had been sinners, and to determine that henceforth they

[1] *Janet's Repentance*, ch. x.

would keep God's commandments by the help of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. What is more extraordinary is that they did keep God's commandments for the rest of their lives." [1]

[1] *Catharine Furze*, p. 358.

II

Statements of this kind coming from such witnesses can hardly fail to interest us, but personal conviction of the reality of conversion can be reached only by getting behind all generalizations to the hard facts themselves. This is what we must now seek to do. The rough system of grouping, which for convenience sake I adopt, any one may fill out in further detail from his own reading and observation.

(1) The facts most obvious and most readily available, and constituting perhaps the largest class, are those which illustrate the power of conversion to free men from the chains of evil habit and in many cases completely to annul the baser temptations of our nature. Of this there is no better nor better known example than that of Colonel

Gardiner. The story of his remarkable conversion, as told by Doddridge, is too familiar to need repetition here; it will be sufficient for my purpose to quote the Colonel's own testimony to its immediate effect upon his life: "I was," he says, "effectually cured of all inclination to that sin I was so strongly addicted to, that I thought nothing but shooting me through the head could have cured me of it; and all desire and inclination to it was removed as entirely as if I had been a sucking child; nor did the temptation return to this day." "I have heard the Colonel frequently say," reports another witness, "that he was much addicted to impurity before his acquaintance with religion; but that, so soon as he was enlightened from above, he felt the power of the Holy Ghost changing his nature so wonderfully, that his sanctification in this respect seemed more remarkable than in any other."[1]

But perhaps the most remarkable results

[1] Quoted in Doddridge's *Life of Gardiner.*

of conversion under this head are to be found in the cases of reformed drunkards; and among these I know of none more striking than that of an Oxford graduate, the son of a clergyman, whose story is given among the conversion documents collected by Professor J. H. Leuba and printed in the *American Journal of Psychology*.[1] Omitting many details, the essential facts, given in the writer's own words, are these: "I was intended from babyhood for the ministry, and had a Grammar School and University career, graduating in Arts at Oxford in 1880. At fifteen I was a confirmed smoker, and used to get drunk often without the master being aware of it. At eighteen I was sent to another school. Here all the older boys, with one or two exceptions, were habitual drinkers, if not drunkards. About two and a half years of this brought me up to the age at which I should enter my university career. I went to Oxford and gained my scholarship

[1] Vol. vii. p. 373.

in the usual way. A reckless, drunken and otherwise impure life passed by quickly enough, and I found myself a graduate, ready, as my poor father thought, to take orders at once. Alas! nothing was further from my mind than the ministry. I knew absolutely nothing of God. Between the period of leaving Oxford and my conversion, I never darkened the door of my father's church, although I lived with him for eight years, making what money I wanted by journalism, and spending it in high carousal with any one who would sit with me and drink it away. So I lived, and would probably have gone on living, had not God turned me around and compelled me to go on another road. . . . I was converted in my own bedroom in my father's rectory house at precisely three o'clock in the afternoon of a hot July day. A young lady friend sent me a copy of Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, asking me my opinion of it as a literary work only. Being proud

of my critical talents, and wishing to enhance myself in my new friend's esteem, I took the book to my bedroom, for quiet, intending to give it a thorough study, and then write to her what I thought of it. It was here that God met me face to face. . . . No words were spoken to me; my soul seemed to see my Saviour in the spirit, and I rejoiced there and then in a conversion so astounding that the whole village heard of it in less than twenty-four hours."

Thus far the story might have been included among those given in the last lecture in proof of the reality of conversion as a fact of consciousness. Now for its value as a fact for life: "The day after my conversion I went into the hayfield to lend a hand with the harvest, and came home drunk. Next morning I was very low indeed; still I felt that God was not going to lift me up like that and then let me fall into lower depths at once. About midday I made on my knees the first prayer before God for twenty years.

From that hour drink has had no terrors for me; I never touch it, never want it. So with every known sin, the deliverance in each case being permanent and complete. I have had no temptations since conversion, God seemingly having shut out Satan from that course with me; he gets a free hand in another way, but never on sins of the flesh."

It is not of course every day that such a narrative finds its way into print; yet whatever incredulous persons, literary or otherwise, may think, transformations as sudden, as complete, and as permanent, are continually taking place as the direct result of conversion. Professor James quotes the saying of a medical man who declared that the only radical remedy he knew for dipsomania was religio-mania.[1] Mr. S. H. Hadley says that he has seen men who had gone the round of various institutions, and tried every other means all to no purpose, instantly cured by

[1] *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 268, note.

Christ alone, and never touch or want a drink till their dying day.[1] But the most significant testimony of recent years is to be found in a volume in the "Contemporary Science Series" published only last year (1907), *The Psychology of Alcoholism*, by Dr. G. B. Cutten. The tenth chapter of the book is entitled "Religious Conversion as a Cure." The author, it will be remembered, is not a theologian but a scientist, and here are some of the things he says. First, he quotes from the report of a meeting in 1901 of the New York Academy of Medicine. At this meeting, which was attended by specialists who had had considerable experience in dealing with alcoholic cases, neither drugs nor medicines were mentioned as possible cures. Two cures only were named; one was hypnotism, and the other religious conversion. One of the speakers—a specialist, Dr. Starr—confessed that the only reformed drunkards of whom he had knowledge were

[1] *Down in Water Street*, p. 201.

those who had been saved, not through medical but through religious influence. Dr. Cutten does not go so far as to exclude all other cures, but he agrees with Dr. Starr in regarding religious conversion as the most effective cure. "Were it desirable," he says, "the Church could eclipse the patent medicine advertisers with the thousands of testimonials which might be produced by alcoholics cured by religious conversions"; he quotes another medical authority as saying that were we not used to the phenomena of religious revivals, the force of reforming energy which they bring with them would strike us as little short of miraculous, and, finally, he declares that in the opinions thus expressed of the value of conversion most authorities on alcoholism concur.

Facts like these may well make the most hardened sceptic rub his eyes; but among patient workers in our great City Missions, though they will be read with quiet thankfulness, they will create no surprise; they know

that thus has it been from the beginning: "He breaks the power of cancelled sin." Of all words that the hand of man ever penned, in the Bible or out of it, I know of none with such strange power to move the heart as those of St. Paul to the Corinthians: "Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners—and such were some of you: but ye were washed, ye were sanctified, ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God." [1]

(2) But the fruits of conversion—its value

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 10, 11. "It seems to me," says Dean Church, "that the exultation apparent in early Christian literature, beginning with the Apostolic epistles, at the prospect now at length disclosed within the bounds of a sober hope, of a great moral revolution in human life,—that the rapturous confidence which pervades these Christian ages, that at last the routine of vice and sin has met its match, that a new and astonishing possibility has come within view, that men, not here and there, but on a large scale, might attain to that hitherto hopeless thing to the multitudes, goodness—is one of the most singular and solemn things in history" (*The Gifts of Civilization*, p. 156).

as a fact for life—are to be seen not only in the changed lives of downright evil men, but in the difference it has made in men whose lives were always outwardly irreproachable. Indeed, Mr. R. H. Hutton comments on the curious fact, as he thinks it, that the high doctrine of conversion, though it may have won its greatest number of apparent triumphs over persons of Colonel Gardiner's type, "has derived all its authority from men of a very different type indeed, men like St. Paul and John Wesley, whose whole life has been in some sense profoundly religious, and in whom the convulsive change called conversion has represented not a change from a life of reckless pleasure or licence to a life of faith, but only a change from one type of faith to another type of faith." [1] A later writer in the *Spectator* [2] goes still further: What need, he asks, could such a man as

[1] "The Metaphysics of Conversion," in *Contemporary Thought and Thinkers*, vol. i. p. 369

[2] In an article, "Christianity and Conversion," September 8, 1906.

Wesley have of conversion? Well but, setting all else aside, is it not manifest that but for that golden hour on May 24, 1738, there would have been no world-wide Methodism, the eighteenth century would have lost one of its greatest names? The Wesley whom we know, the man who turned England upside down and left his mark deep and broad over the whole English-speaking world, was (as he himself always affirmed) the child of the great experience which came to him in the little room in Aldersgate Street. The same is true of Thomas Chalmers and the Apostle Paul. "Chalmers in his early days preached morals alone, and with no moral result. He became filled with the love of Christ and with that power behind him engraved the ethical precepts on the heart of Scotland."[1] Saul of Tarsus was a gifted young rabbi who would doubtless have made for himself a name among his own people; yet, but for that which hap-

[1] *The Eternal Religion*, p. 102, by J. Brierley.

pened on the Damascus road, none would remember him to-day, the world's history would run in other channels.

(3) In multitudes, too, distinguished from their fellows neither by a bad pre-eminence in evil nor by any far-shining gifts of intellect, conversion has been the door into a fuller and richer life both mental and moral. The late Hugh Price Hughes' biographer tells us that his conversion was "the prelude of a singular bursting forth of his mental powers. The opening of the doors of the spirit was also that of the mind." [1] This has been, if not, as Hughes himself was wont in after life to insist, the normal, at least, a very common experience in the lives of humble and uneducated men and women: the quickening of the spiritual life has broken up the deep slumber of the mind and set ajar its long-closed doors. The supreme illustration of this on the large scale is to be found

[1] *Life of Hugh Price Hughes*, by his Daughter, p. 31.

in Wesley's wonderful *Journals*, and in the tireless zeal with which he laboured to satisfy the demands of the hunger and thirst after knowledge which he himself had done so much to create. It is worthy of note, too, that Moody's great educational institutions which have done so much for the widening of the outlook of thousands of humble Christian workers all over the North American continent, were the immediate outcome of his fervent evangelism.

Should not the great access of human gladness which conversion has brought into life also be reckoned unto it for righteousness? John Bunyan, eager to talk to the very crows that sat upon the ploughed lands of the mercy of God to him; John Wesley, changed from a convict seeking to shorten his sentence by good conduct into a free man rejoicing in his freedom; Billy Bray, the "excellent little illiterate English evangelist" of Professor James' lectures, hearing one foot say "Glory" and the other answer

"Amen," all the time that he is walking—these are but three in a vast and happy throng of human souls around whom there gathers, like a radiant, fostering, cheering air, the abundant joy of faith and hope and love and praise. When Moody and Sankey left Birmingham at the close of the Mission referred to in the previous lecture,[1] Dr. Dale declared that some of the most remarkable results of their visit were to be found among those who had long been members of Christian churches. "I hardly know," he said, "how to describe the change which has passed over them. It is like the change which comes upon a landscape where clouds which have been hanging over it for hours suddenly vanish, and the sunlight seems to fill both heaven and earth. There is a joyousness and an elasticity of spirit, and a hopefulness, which have completely transformed them." A London journalist who was once told off to report for a daily paper

[1] See p. 39.

the proceedings of an immense gathering of members of the Salvation Army drawn from all parts of the world, declared that what impressed him above everything else was the crowd's quenchless rejoicing; never before had he found himself in the midst of such a throng of happy human faces. Now I venture to say that gladness such as this, passing though it may be, is no mean part of this world's good. And if it be true, as Robert Louis Stevenson tells us, that there is no duty we so much underrate as the duty of being happy, that the goodness of God knocks at our sullen heart in vain, then a religious experience which has power thus to stab the spirit broad awake is a fact for life of the most real kind.

Or, look at the more tangible results, in the shape of difficult right deeds, for which after conversion men and women have found themselves sufficient. To one class of the facts only can I now refer. Restitution, it will be freely admitted, is one of the most difficult

of human duties; perhaps nothing in our eyes witnesses more conclusively to the working of a new spirit within a man than his resolve, at all costs, to confess, and, as far as may be, to repair an ancient wrong. Now, with instances of this kind our conversion records abound. Here is one from Professor Leuba's collection: "At a meeting I offered myself voluntarily for service to God. Quicker than thought the Spirit admonished me that I had wronged a man and I must confess and right that wrong. I had an awful struggle with myself for a year. Every time I prayed this thing would come up. I debated with myself and with the Lord and tried to convince myself that I need not do this. I saw no way out of it, nor how to make right the wrong, as I was strapped with debts, and prospects were very gloomy. God at last gave me the grace and courage to overcome my pride and write to the man"; and in the end full restoration was made.[1]

[1] Article quoted above, p. 380.

Here is another example from Mr. S. H. Hadley's experience: "Brother Hadley," said one of the Water Street converts to him one day, "the devil is after me; I robbed the poor box of ten dollars in the old life, and the devil tells me that because 'I done time for it,' it is mine, but Jesus says 'No, pay it back,'" and he handed him five two dollar bills.[1] A still more striking illustration is given in one of Henry Drummond's addresses to students: "I knew a man who led a woman astray. He was fast and evil then, but a year or two after he was changed and became what he is—one of the most prominent men in the religious world. But through all his success and apparent blessings there was the stain and the shadow of that woman's life upon him. Only three people ever knew about it, and it was twenty years ago. He preached all through England and Scotland and Ireland in the hope, I fervently believe, that that woman might hear him and

[1] *Down in Water Street*, p. 131.

be saved. Every prayer he prayed he prayed for her. Not long ago I was in London at a meeting which he was addressing, and after the meeting a woman walked up to him with bent head, weeping. I saw them alone as they stood. That was the woman he had searched for in the restitution of twenty years." [1]

If then—and illustrations of this kind might be multiplied almost indefinitely—conversion can after this fashion prove itself a power which makes for righteousness, for the straightening out of the twisted strands of life, may we not once more insist upon its significance as a fact for life?

(4) Thus far we have sought for the fruits of conversion, for the most part, in the life of the individual. The facts are not less arresting when we turn to the history of communities and nations. We are sometimes told that the next revival will be

[1] See G. A. Smith's *Life of Henry Drummond*, p. 479.

ethical; and it is devoutly to be wished that the prophets may prove right, for an ethical revival is always needed. But if the implication is that the revivals of the past have not been ethical, it is necessary to protest. Every great religious awakening has set forward, in the largest meaning of the word, the salvation of the people; it has given them a keener moral vision, a more vigorous conscience, higher ideals both of private and of public duty; and it has set free some of the mightiest and most enduring of all the forces which to-day are making for social well-being and national righteousness. This is the verdict which the facts justify and demand. Thus, e.g., it was the unanimous testimony of all observers during the recent revival in Wales that not only were all the grosser vices reduced to the vanishing point, but the subtler sins of unforgiving rancour, non-payment of debts, dishonest work, were abated. In nothing was the leader of the movement clearer and

more emphatic than in his insistence that injuries must be forgiven and debts must be paid.[1] Besides the hosts of rejoicing converts with which Moody's work in Great Britain filled all the churches, there sprang up in its track a multitude of charities, philanthropies, associations, whose helping, healing ministry has not ceased to this day. Henry Drummond did not hesitate to say that in Scotland, so far-reaching was, and is, the influence of that work, that any one who knows the inner religious history of the country must regard this time as nothing short of a national epoch.[2]

The same watchful solicitude for the moral and social obligations of religion marked the "Great Awakening" in New England under Jonathan Edwards: "Because of God's great goodness and His gracious presence in the town of Northampton during the late

[1] See Mr. Stead's pamphlet referred to above, p. 61.

[2] *Dwight L. Moody*, p. 81. See also G. A. Smith's chapter on "The Great Mission."

spiritual revival,"—so runs in substance the preamble to the Covenant which Edwards drew up and which the people of Northampton subscribed—" the people present themselves before the Lord, to renounce their evil ways and to put away their abominations before His eyes. They solemnly promise and vow before the Lord, in all their concerns with their neighbour, to have a strict regard to rules of honesty, justice, and uprightness; not to overreach or defraud him in any matter, or, either wilfully or through want of care, to injure him in any of his honest possessions or rights; and to have a tender respect, not only to their own interest, but to his; and particularly never to give him cause of offence by wilfully or negligently forbearing to pay their just debts; whenever they may be conscious of having in the past wronged their neighbour in his outward estate, never to rest till they have made that restitution which the rules of moral equity require. They promise to avoid all back-

biting, evil speaking, and slandering, as also everything that feeds a spirit of bitterness or ill-will, or secret grudge; not to ridicule a neighbour's failings, or needlessly insist on his faults; to do nothing in a spirit of revenge. And further, they will not allow their private interest or honour, or the desire for victory against a contrary party, to lead them into any course of which their consciences would reproach them as hurtful to religion or the interests of Christ's kingdom; and particularly in public affairs, not to allow the interest of party or the desire of worldly ambition to lead them counter to the interests of true religion. Those who are young promise to allow themselves in no diversions or pastimes, meetings or companies, which would hinder a devout spirit engaged in religion, to avoid everything that tends to lasciviousness, and which they believe will not be approved by the infinitely pure and holy eye of God. They finally consecrate themselves to perform with great watch-

fulness the duties entailed by family relationships, whether parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, masters, mistresses and servants." [1]

Nor was John Wesley one whit behind his great Puritan contemporary in his stern resolve to recognize no profession of conversion which did not bear fruit in life. There is a very instructive incident in the life of John Nelson, one of the early Methodist preachers. A woman, whom Nelson had dismissed from the Society about twelve months before for misbehaviour, stood charged at the York Assizes with a capital crime. Nelson, being at that time in the York Circuit, was subpœnaed to appear at the Crown bar to assign his reasons for having put this woman out of the Methodist Society. Nelson read the rules of the Society in Court, and at the end of that rule which forbids contracting

[1] I quote from Prof. A. V. G. Allen's *Jonathan Edwards*, in the "American Religious Leaders" series, p. 156.

a debt without any probability of being able to pay it, he stopped and said, "My lord, this was my reason for dismissing this woman from the Society to which I belong." The judge arose and said, "Good morality, Mr. Nelson"; and then being seated again desired him to read the rest of the rules. After hearing them, his lordship said emphatically to the Court, "Gentlemen, this is true Christianity." [1] When Matthew Arnold indulges in one of his characteristic little jibes at the expense of a company of Cornish revivalists who, he says, "will have no difficulty in tasting, seeing, hearing, and feeling God, twenty times over, to-night, and yet may be none the better for it to-morrow morning," [2] he may be saying nothing literally inaccurate, but he conveys a wholly untrue and unjust impression of the results of religion in that Methodist county. The Cornishman's faith has made him every way

[1] *The Early Methodist Preachers*, vol. i., p. 165.
[2] In his *St. Paul and Protestantism.*

a better man, and I shall appeal to another English man of letters to reverse Arnold's unfavourable judgment. "You seem a very temperate people here," Mr. Augustine Birrell once observed to a Cornish miner; "how did it happen?" The miner replied, solemnly raising his cap, "There came a man amongst us once, and his name was John Wesley."[1] But there is no need of further witness. Wesley's sound English sense, his strongly ethical nature, his healthy hatred of Antinomianism in all its forms so stamped themselves upon the whole Evangelical revival that to-day writers of all schools, even those who are furthest removed from his religious faith, freely acknowledge the greatness of the moral revolution which he wrought in the life of England.[2]

[1] *Res Judicatæ*, p. 129.

[2] See, e.g., the striking tributes of John Morley (*Nineteenth Century*, February, 1892) and Goldwin Smith (*Cowper*, English Men of Letters series, p. 45).

III

The truth of these things may be admitted; indeed, it can hardly be denied; [1] but, it may be urged, there is much else to be taken into account before we finally assess the value of

[1] And yet it has been denied and never with more personal vehemence than in that recent remarkable autobiography, *Father and Son*; "After my long experience," says the writer, "I have surely the right to protest against the untruth (would that I could apply to it any other word!) that evangelical religion or any religion in a violent form, is a wholesome or valuable or desirable adjunct to human life. It divides heart from heart. It sets up a vain, chimerical ideal in the barren pursuit of which all the tender, indulgent affections, all the genial play of life, all the exquisite pleasures and soft resignations of the body, all that enlarges and calms the soul, are exchanged for what is harsh and void and negative. It encourages a stern and ignorant spirit of condemnation; it throws altogether out of gear the healthy movement of the conscience; it invents virtues which are sterile and cruel; it invents sins which are no sins at all, but which darken the heaven of innocent joy with futile clouds of remorse."

conversion as a fact for life. If there are real are there not also sham conversions? If there are religious experiences under which all life suffers a change "into something rich and strange," are there not others, to all outward seeming the same, which work no gracious renewal? Nay, more, is it not a mournful fact that the worst moral failures are sometimes found among those most open to religious appeal, that it is sometimes but a very short step from the most intense religious emotion to the fiercest animal passion? These things, alas! are so, and for the Christian Church the lesson is obvious: she must be as diligent to *moralize* as to evange-

Those who have followed the writer's painful but absorbing story will not be altogether unprepared for this outburst with which it closes. Much, however, as we may sympathize with Mr. Gosse, it is none the less to be regretted that a man of such wide reading and catholic tastes did not remember that outside the little world whose narrow ways cramped his youthful years there lay another world where men live under a larger sky and breathe a freer air and with a better right to name themselves "evangelical."

lize, as patient to teach as she is eager to convert.

Nevertheless, though the moral failures which follow on the back of conversion were much more numerous than they are, the argument of this lecture would remain substantially intact. It is worthy of note, by the way, that Professor James and Professor Starbuck are both thorough-going optimists concerning the results of conversion. All the more striking instances of conversion, says the former, have been permanent.[1] Starbuck, after investigating a hundred cases, came to the conclusion that "the effect of conversion is to bring with it a changed attitude towards life which is fairly constant and permanent, although the feelings fluctuate." "In other words, persons who have passed through conversion having once taken a stand for the religious life, tend to feel themselves identified with it, no matter how much their religious enthusiasm de-

[1] *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 257.

clines." [1] But though it were not so, and the percentage of breakdowns should turn out to be much larger than the psychologists' rosy estimate allows for, we should still be without one jot or tittle of excuse for dismissing the subject with a pitying smile. "Men lapse from every level—we need no statistics to tell us that." But it is the rise rather than the fall which is the spiritually significant thing; it is in it we get the true measure of the divine force at work in human life for its redemption. And even when the results of conversion are poor and disappointing, when one who has been converted remains on a lower moral plane than another who has passed through no such experience, we have still to remember what the one would have been if even such poor grace as he has received had never touched him at all, what the other might become if his larger, richer nature were visited from on high. And, finally, however conversion has failed, its

[1] *The Psychology of Religion*, pp. 355, 360.

failures do not cancel its achievements; what it has done it has done; its record stands for all men to read; by it, it claims and is content to be judged.

IV

Again I ask, what shall we say to these things? If the change we call conversion reported itself only to my own individual consciousness, then, though it would be a fact for science to take note of and account for—especially since the witness of my consciousness is confirmed by that of multitudes around me—its significance to others would be of a wholly different kind from that which belongs to it when it comes bearing with it such outward and visible signs. It is signs such as these which are Christianity's one answer to them that bear witness against it. Through age after age it stands in the world's great judgment hall and cries aloud, "Believe me for the very works' sake": if that plea fails, it has no more that it can say. Men do indeed speak sometimes of "proving"

Christianity, as if it were a kind of mathematical problem through which, step by step, you could work your way down to the triumphant Q.E.D. at the bottom. But you cannot prove Christianity; Christianity must prove itself. The gospel, Paul says, is a *power* of God; it is a divine force, and therefore, as some one has well said, its proof must be not logical but dynamical; it is demonstrated not by argument but by what it does. When John sent two of his disciples to Jesus, saying, "Art Thou He that cometh, or look we for another?" we read that Jesus said—no, we do not read that Jesus *said* anything; what we read is this: "In that hour He cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits; and on many that were blind He bestowed sight." *Then* "He answered and said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard." There is the real, silencing answer; not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

I am not afraid to trust Christianity anywhere. It will hold its own with the solitary thinker in his study; it will stand the cross-fire of experts in the witness box; it will state the case for itself on paper to any man and await without fear the result. But if we would see it in the greatness of its strength we must see it at work. While it only argues others will argue back again; when it gets to work it puts all its adversaries to silence. "And seeing the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it." Of course they could not; the God that answereth by healed men, He must be God. It is easy—alas! that it should be so easy—for men like Professor Huxley to make merry over certain incidents in the Gospel story, but while the gospel itself remains the one thing on earth which has power to cast out the devils, and to tame the wild lusts and passions of the human heart, no weapon that is formed against it can prosper.

Saints of the early dawn of Christ,
Saints of Imperial Rome,
Saints of the cloistered Middle Age,
Saints of the modern home;
Saints of the soft and sunny East,
Saints of the frozen seas,
Saints of the isles that wave their palms
In the far Antipodes;
Saints of the mart and busy streets,
Saints of the squalid lanes,
Saints of the silent solitudes,
Of the prairies and the plains;
Saints who were wafted to the skies
In the torment robe of flame,
Saints who have graven on men's thoughts
A monumental name;

—compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses we ask again, has Christ failed, or can Christianity die?

VARIETIES OF CONVERSION

III

VARIETIES OF CONVERSION

THE preceding lectures have, I trust, helped to convince us that we are in this inquiry in contact with reality. But if they have done this, they must at the same time have done more: they must have revealed the exceeding variety and complexity of the facts before us. It is enough to mention St. Paul and St. Augustine, Sampson Staniforth and William Cowper, the miners of Cornwall and the reclaimed drunkards of Water Street, to show what wide reaches of religious experience are covered by the term conversion. For one man conversion means the slaying of the beast within him; in another it brings the calm of conviction to an unquiet mind; for a third it is

the entrance into a larger liberty and a more abundant life; and yet again it is the gathering into one of the forces of a soul at war within itself. The late Dr. John Watson—my lamented and distinguished predecessor in this lectureship—has classified conversions as moral, spiritual, intellectual and practical.[1] It matters comparatively little what principle of classification we adopt, or whether we adopt any at all—the best is imperfect; what does matter is that we steadfastly resist all attempts to "standardize" conversion. There are types of conversion to which many do conform; there is none to which any must conform. There is but one Father's house, but it is reached by many roads; each man must travel as he can, and no man must dictate the going of his neighbour. Attention has been drawn in a previous lecture to the

[1] In a sermon on "Conversion" in *The Inspiration of our Faith*. See also the chapter on "Regeneration" in *The Doctrines of Grace* by the same writer.

striking unity which underlies the many manifestations of the consciousness of salvation, alike in the first days and in later Christian history. In the present lecture our aim will be to note the not less striking diversities of form in which the conversion experience reports itself.

I

If we were to make careful inquiry into the early religious history of the members of an ordinary evangelical Christian Church to-day, we should probably find that they could be divided roughly according to a simple threefold classification. In the first place, there are those whom F. W. Newman calls the "once-born,"[1] children of God from their birth, who have never left the Father's house, nor ever known the want and darkness of the far-off country. At the opposite extreme to these are those whose religious life began in a great and sudden upheaval; they are the "twice-born," and to them the day of their natural birth is not more plainly marked in the calendar than is the day of their spiritual re-birth. And,

[1] See *The Soul*, chap. iii.

finally, between these two extremes, at various points along the line which unites them, is to be found almost every kind of religious experience, from the long and slow growth of some, to the fierce, volcanic outbursts which mark the life of others.

Of the first of these—the "once-born," as Newman calls them—it does not fall within the province of these lectures to speak, and I must content myself with an expression of regret that evangelical Christianity has not been more ungrudging in its recognition of their presence among us and of their standing in the Christian Church. I believe, with Dr. Dale, that the Holy Spirit's action on the spiritual nature of a child commences very early, and that where He is not resisted, the work of renewal is as gradual as the unfolding of any of the higher faculties of our nature. If, as Dale thinks, "renewal" is not the right word to use in such a case, let us say that, as the natural life develops, the divine Spirit simply crowns and perfects it with the life

that comes from God. "There are not a few who can testify that 'from their childhood,' they knew, not 'the scriptures,' but God Himself; they came to know Him they cannot tell how; they knew Him just as they knew the blue sky or their mother's love; they knew Him before they could understand any name by which in our imperfect human speech we have endeavoured to affirm His goodness, His power, or His glory." Probably, too, as Dale suggests, the number of such persons might be indefinitely increased if we did not imply in so much that we say to them that they belong to the devil and have to be brought to Christ, while the truth is, that they belong to Christ and have to be kept from the devil.[1]

Our immediate concern, however, is with those varieties of the conversion experience which would entitle their possessors to a place in the second or third of the classes which have

[1] In a series of papers on the relation of children to the Church in *The Congregationalist*, 1873.

just been described. And, first, before considering any of our later records, it will be well to take the evidence of the New Testament itself.

II

Among the first believers, says Benjamin Jowett, conversion was "almost always sudden"[1]; "sudden conversions," says Professor Leuba, "seem to have been the rule."[2] And of course such general summaries admit of easy if partial justification. It is easy, too, to explain (as Jowett does) why, in the circumstances that then existed, conversions should have been for the most part sudden. None the less we shall do well to receive such statements with caution. St. Paul was not the only man to be converted in New Testament days. Every child can tell the story of what befel on the Damascus road; but who of us can date with certainty the

[1] Essay "On Conversion and Changes of Character" in *St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians, Galatians and Romans*, vol. ii., p. 103.

[2] Article quoted above, p. 318.

supreme crisis in the life of St. Peter? When we remember how many of the first converts to Christianity were gathered from among those devout persons, who, though not Jews themselves, had yet found in Judaism what the old and dying faiths of the world could not give, we are sure there must have been others besides young Timothy whose conversion was sudden only in this sense, that the fruit which for long had been slowly ripening fell at a touch into the husbandman's basket.

But even if we allow that most of the first Christians were brought to Christ by sudden conversion, this is by no means to say that the New Testament presents us with but a single type of conversion. The Acts of the Apostles alone should be sufficient to deliver us from the tyranny of a type. Over against the story of Saul of Tarsus, with its dazzling accompaniments of marvel and mystery—the voice from heaven, the light above the brightness of the sun, the three days without sight, or food, or drink—stands the simple narrative

of the Ethiopian eunuch, reading the Hebrew Scriptures as he rode in his chariot, hearing the truth that was preached to him by Philip, and greeting it with eager rejoicing. It needed the roar and crash of the earthquake, that shook the foundations of his prison house, to bring conviction to the soul of the Philippian jailor; but in the same city was one whose heart opened to her Lord without noise or violence, as when day breaks over a silent summer sea.

There is still a further suggestion of the diversity of the Spirit's operations in the variety of New Testament metaphor by which these are described. The most familiar is, of course, that of the new birth; but while it would be sheer pedantry, or worse, to complain of the prominence which Christian theology has always given to this term, on the other hand, it may not be out of place, in justice to the manysidedness of the scriptural conception, to remind ourselves that this is not the only figure under which is set forth the nature of

the change wrought in man by God. Thus, e.g., it is described as a resurrection from the dead, a change from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom, or, still more simply, as conversion.[1] There is, as Dr. Newton Clarke says,[2] good reason why regeneration should be the favourite name for describing, from the Divine side, the beginning of the divine life in man; but if any man, conscious of the reality of the change, finds some other figure truer to the facts of his own experience, let him not hesitate to use it; the warrant for his freedom is the New Testament itself. Even our familiar and comprehensive "conversion" is not the only legitimate name; perhaps it is not in every case the best possible name for the experience it describes. Conversion is the turning round of the soul from evil to good, from sin to God. But the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews prefers to speak

[1] E.g.: Eph. ii. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 9; Rom. vi. 22; Jas. v. 19. See J. B. Mayor's note on "Regeneration," *Epistle of James*, p. 186.

[2] *Outlines of Christian Theology*, p. 396.

rather of our being "enlightened" [1]; so that instead of speaking of a man's conversion we might speak with equal accuracy, and in some cases perhaps with more perfect fitness, of his "illumination," the diffusion of divine light through the sin-darkened soul.[2]

Manifold, however, as are the types of conversion exhibited or suggested by the New Testament, we should be mistaken in supposing that even these exhaust all possible varieties of the experience. One consideration alone will be sufficient to make this clear. When the New Testament was written Christianity was a new thing in the world. The type of character with which to-day we have grown so familiar, the character, I mean,

[1] Heb. vi. 4; x. 32. Cp. 2 Cor. iv. 6.

[2] Cp. Dora Greenwell's account of the conversion of Lacordaire: "This wondrous spiritual change appears from his own account of it to have come to him as a strong mental illumination, enabling him to see that Christianity was a living fact; and his words in speaking of it seem to recall the literal, almost matter-of-fact simplicity of the statement of the blind man in Scripture, 'This one thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see'" (p. 9).

not wholly and deliberately Christian, and yet in the main moulded by Christian ideals, was at that time unknown. When among ourselves to-day a man definitely takes upon himself the vows of Christian discipleship, and joins himself to the company of Christ's followers, he is not, except in rare instances, conscious of any violent break with the beliefs of his past life; the change is not in the substance of his creed, but in its quickening power; in becoming a Christian he is, after all, but taking a step for which, in a certain very real sense, all the past has been a preparation; for, as Benjamin Jowett truly says, Christianity is not only part and parcel of the law of the land, it is part and parcel of the character of each one, which even the worst of men cannot wholly shake off. But in the world of the New Testament, except in so far as Judaism was a preparation for Christianity, nothing like this was either known or possible. When the converts did not use the synagogue as a bridge, they passed straight out of heathenism

into Christianity, with the complete dislocation of their whole life, intellectual as well as moral, which such a change must have involved. Is it not, therefore, reasonable to expect that the long course of Christian history will sometimes present us with forms of conversion which are but very dimly if at all foreshadowed in the brief records which reflect the life of the first believers ?

III

St. Paul was not the only man, I said a few minutes ago, to be converted in New Testament days. But Paul was converted, and his conversion was after the manner so well known to us. Moreover, conversions of the Pauline —i.e. of the sudden, explosive—type have never ceased in the Church from that day till this. Let us hear what Professor James has to say on the matter. After giving two or three illustrations, he says, "I might multiply cases almost indefinitely, but these will suffice to show you how real, definite, and memorable an event a sudden conversion may be to him who has the experience. . . . There is too much evidence of this for any doubt of it to be possible. . . . Were we writing the story of the mind from the purely natural history point of view, with no religious

interest whatever, we should still have to write down man's liability to sudden and complete conversion as one of his most curious peculiarities." [1] Indeed, this is a fact so well established that it may seem superfluous to labour the point further; a few very brief illustrations, however, may be given in a word or two. John Calvin, who very rarely reveals the secrets of his own soul, in his preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms*, tells how God drew him from his obstinate attachment to the superstitions of the Papacy by "a sudden conversion." [2] "I was," says Lacordaire, "unbelieving in the evening, on the morrow a Christian, certain with an invincible certainty." [3] "I was converted," says the Oxford graduate whose story I referred to in the previous lecture, "in my own bedroom in my father's rectory house at precisely three o'clock in the afternoon of a hot July day."

[1] *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 226, 230.

[2] See T. M. Lindsay's *History of the Reformation*, vol. ii., p. 97.

[3] Dora Greenwell's *Lacordaire*, p. 11.

"About a quarter before nine," wrote Wesley in his *Journal.* "Most conversions of alcoholics," says Dr. G. B. Cutten, "are of a sudden nature." [1] One of the most striking and original figures in the wonderful history of the Free Church of Scotland during the last century is that of John Duncan—"Rabbi Duncan" as he was often called. In him, says his biographer, "we behold the most sceptical of men transformed in a moment into the most believing of men." [2] He presents, as Professor Knight puts it, "the picture of a strong man suddenly arrested, struck down in his mid-career of linguistic study and speculative daring, by the realities of the unseen world;" his was "one of those swift upheavals of experience which attest the agency of a Higher Power working on the spirit of man," and which "may be often quoted as a proof of the genuineness of such

[1] *The Psychology of Alcoholism,* p. 288.

[2] *Memoir of John Duncan,* by David Brown, p. 508.

a process whatever may be our theory of its method or rationale." [1]

There are some, it may be, who will listen to narratives of this kind with feelings bordering on incredulity. They have no experiences of their own with which they can even approximately relate them, and they are tempted, in consequence, to dismiss them as fanciful and unreal. But facts are not fairy armies which vanish into thin air at the waving of a magician's wand; and in this case the facts are so numerous and so well authenticated that to attempt to ignore them is simply to put the fool's cap on our own head. And if, instead of ignoring, we will patiently investigate these sudden conversions, two points in regard to them will, I think, become clear to us. First, while no divine significance attaches to the manner of conversion but only to the results of it, and while sudden conversions are often followed

[1] *Colloquia Peripatetica*, by W. Knight, pp. xliv., xlviii.

by disappointing reactions, on the other hand the lives of multitudes, lifted at once and permanently to a higher level, remain to attest the reality of the experience ; [1] and, secondly, it seems unquestionable, however we explain it, that there are some whose one chance of better things lies in some sudden soul-shattering experience, which overturns the life from its foundations. Mansoul will not yield to its besiegers ; it must be carried by sudden storm. Here for some is their only hope—in one dead lift of resolution.[2] And this, it may be said in passing, is the justification, in part at least, of the methods of the revivalist. They may

[1] "However sudden," says Jowett, "were the conversions of the earliest believers, however wonderful the circumstances which attended them, they were not for that reason the less lasting or sincere" (Essay quoted above, p. 104).

[2] "No doubt there are many persons and some social classes," says Mr. R. H. Hutton, "for whom there is far more chance of 'conversion,' in Messrs. Moody and Sankey's sense, than of any gradual change." (See Essay quoted above.) Cp. Dr. Cutten's statement concerning alcoholics: "Few, if any, cures are recorded among conversions of the more deliberate type" (p. 289).

not appeal to all; some they may even alienate; but the Church is debtor to all, and through the revivalist she seeks to discharge her debt to those whose temperament makes salvation by crisis a necessity; storm and stress, upheaval and convulsion, are for them the appointed way into life. Human nature, rightly interpreted, reveals the need as plainly as history records the fact of sudden conversion.

IV

If, however, the facts compel the recognition of the reality of sudden conversion, no less plainly do they declare that this is but one type among many. The utmost that we have any right to insist on is, not the necessity but the possibility of sudden conversion, not that men must but that men may in a moment be delivered from the bondage and guilt of sin. To assume, as is sometimes done, that the highest kind of religious experience must always be able to date its beginning by the clock is to contradict the testimony both of scripture and of experience. With some the change is swift, startling, dramatic; the tide of the new life comes in like the waters of our English Solway, with a rush and a roar, carrying all before it in one mighty sweep. With others the change is long and slow, so long

and slow that they are never able to date it, or to speak of it as a single, definite act. Sometimes the light breaks as in our land comes the dawn, soft and grey and with long twilight; sometimes as in Eastern climes, where day leaps on the earth full born. But here again the facts are their own best expositors; once more, therefore, I turn to the records of Christian biography. In the examples which follow we shall note an almost entire absence of those well-marked emotional characteristics which are so conspicuous in many of our conversion narratives. "I do not remember," says John Livingstone—a name well known in Scottish evangelical circles, and linked with many pious memories of the Kirk of Shotts and a marvellous work of grace there in the seventeenth century—"I do not remember any particular time of conversion or that I was much cast down or lift up."[1] Reference was made in a previous lecture to

[1] See J. Walker's *Scottish Theology and Theologians*, p. 168.

the very explicit language of John Henry Newman concerning his conversion.[1] His biographer, however, points out that though it was to evangelical teaching that he owed his spiritual life, yet "he had not been converted in that special way which it laid down as imperative, but so plainly against rule as to make it very doubtful in the eyes of normal Evangelicals whether he had really been converted at all." "I speak of conversion," Newman himself wrote—this was in 1821—"with great diffidence, being obliged to adopt the language of books. For my own feelings, as far as I remember, were so different from any account I have ever read, that I dare not go by what may be an individual case."[2] After one of Moody's memorable

[1] See p. 28.

[2] Transcribing the memorandum in 1826, he adds: "In the matter in question, that is, conversion, my own feelings were not violent, but a returning to, a renewing of, principles, under the power of the Holy Spirit, which I had already felt and in a measure acted on when young" (*Letters and Correspondence*, vol. i., pp. 122–4).

meetings in Scotland in the early seventies, six young Edinburgh students went back to their hotel to discuss far into the night the remarkable scene they had just witnessed: "Some one started the question whether it is usual to remember the date and the incidents of one's own conversion. At such a moment it was easy to be confidential, and it turned out that we were equally divided, three remembering the circumstances in which their spiritual life began, and three not." [1] The following from Charles Kingley's *Life* needs no comment: "*June 12, 1841*—My birth-night. I have been for the last hour on the seashore, not dreaming, but thinking deeply and strongly, and forming determinations which are to affect my destiny through time and through eternity. Before the sleeping earth and the sleepless sea and stars I have devoted myself to God; a vow never (if he gives me the faith I pray for) to be recalled." [2] Very

[1] G. A. Smith's *Life of Henry Drummond*, p. 65.

[2] Vol. i., p. 35.

different, and perhaps still more striking, is the story of a Japanese Christian related by Dr. Dale. He was a man of considerable intellectual culture and great intellectual activity and vigour. He had been a Confucian, and for many years had studied Confucianism carefully, but failed to find in it what he wanted. The rest shall be told in his own words: "Just then a Japanese convert to Christianity gave me a Chinese Bible, and asked me to read it. He told me that the translation was a great achievement of scholarship, and that I should be charmed with its literary beauty. I found that he was right; the translation is admirable. I read page after page until I came to the thirteenth chapter of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, beginning, 'If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.' I read the whole chapter, I was arrested, fascinated. I had never seen or heard or dreamt of a morality like *that*. I

felt that it was above the reach of the human race, that it must have come from heaven, that the man who wrote that chapter must have received light from God—from God, about whose existence I had been speculating. And then I read the Gospel of John, and the words of Christ filled me with wonder. They were not to be resisted. I could not refuse Him my faith." And so he became a Christian.[1]

[1] *The Living Christ and the Four Gospels*, pp. 42–5. To the examples given in the text may be added the following reference to John Newton from Sir J. Stephen's essay on the Evangelical Succession: "There is a natural history of religious conversions. It commences with melancholy, advances through contrition to faith, is then conducted to tranquillity, and after a while to rapture, and subsides at length into an abiding consolation and peace. No epoch in this mental progress can be passed over by the narrator of any such change without raising some suspicion of its genuineness in those who have studied the human heart, rather as it is described in pious books than as it works in pious men. But, braving all such suspicions and strong in conscious sincerity, Newton acknowledged, without the least reserve, that he had overleapt all these stages. His heart of oak had been rent by no poignant sorrow, nor had it been agitated by any tumultuous joy from the

The same evidences of variety meet us when from the manner of conversion we turn to the motives and agencies which lead up to it and help to bring it about. Saint Cyprian, it is said, was brought to God by the reading of the book of Jonah.[1] Principal Lindsay remarks on the number of true mediæval conversions due to a vision of the Virgin Mary.[2] Once and again, in the Duomo of Florence,

beginning to the end of his spiritual course. With no vehement internal conflict whatever he shed the skin of a dissolute seaman, and sheltered himself in that of a devout clergyman. He gave up bad habits of life for an infinitely better course, with abundant good sense, seriousness and deliberation, but with very little passion or excitement. Ill as such an anomaly squared with the prepossessions of those for whom he wrote, he would not deviate by an hair's breadth from the simple truth, nor affect any feeling which he had not really experienced, either to propitiate the good will of his teachers or disciples or to do homage to their religious theories."

[1] R. F. Horton's *Minor Prophets* (Century Bible), p. 197.

[2] Lecture on St. Bernard, in *The Evangelical Succession*, vol. i., p. 175. Cp. the curious record of the sudden conversion to Roman Catholicism of a free-thinking French Jew, quoted by Professor James (p. 223).

Savonarola referred to his conversion: "A word did it," he used to say, but what the word was his closest friends never knew.[1] It was the sight of a tree, dry and leafless in the winter, that first kindled in Brother Lawrence the high thoughts of God that cut him loose from the world.[2] Lacordaire, on the other hand, was wont to declare that in his case no man, no book, no sudden or striking appeal or event was the chosen agent of his conversion; he only knew that after nine years of doubt he heard the voice of God and answered to His call.[3] "I was engaged to be married and she died," said a young communicant once to Dr. Alexander Whyte.[4] "In many souls," says Bishop Paget, "the first impulse of conversion may be the sense of some unearthliness, some elevation above all worldly ways and

[1] Villari's *Life and Times of Savonarola*, book i. chap. 1 (footnote).

[2] *The Practice of the Presence of God*, first conversation.

[3] Dora Greenwell's *Lacordaire*, p. 11.

[4] *Bible Characters*, Stephen to Timothy, p. 113.

thoughts, in a Christian life." [1] "Once in an American Church," says Tennyson's biographer, "the clergyman yielding to some sudden impulse, recited, much to the scandal and indignation of his congregation, 'The Charge of the Light Brigade.' Some days later a man called on him and said, 'Sir, I am one of the survivors of the Balaclava charge. I have led a wild, bad life, and haven't been near a church, till by accident and from curiosity I went into your church last Sunday. I heard you recite that great poem and it has changed my life: I shall never disgrace my cloth again.'" "So," said the clergyman, in a letter to the poet, "though I may have lost my congregation, I have saved a soul by your poem." [2] Verily, the wind bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth.

[1] *Studies in the Christian Character*, p. lx.

[2] Lord Tennyson's Life of his Father, p. 717.

V

If, then, such is the great variety of form in which the fact of conversion clothes itself, there is one very obvious inference which we must not fail to draw. I do not propose at this point to go behind the great diversities of experience to which the facts bear witness and seek an explanation of them. Modern psychologists may be right when they tell us that sudden conversion is connected with "the possession of an active subliminal self," and that it is in those in whom certain peculiarities of temperament—pronounced emotional sensibility and so forth—unite that religion finds the best subjects for transformations of the striking and dramatic kind. This may be so, but after all the particular form which conversion takes is a matter rather of psychological than religious signi-

ficance and interest. If it be said that a man such as St. Paul was certain to be converted, if at all, in some such way as is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, religion has no interest in disputing the statement, for the significance of St. Paul's conversion lies not at all in the manner of it, but wholly in the results of it; and, as some one has remarked, the divine presence would have been just as decisively certified if Saul had become a disciple with the calmness of Matthew, or Zacchaeus, or Timothy. Why in one case conversion should clothe itself in certain emotional habiliments which in another are wholly wanting, is, I repeat, a question not so much for religion as psychology, and we may with a good conscience leave it to the psychologists to thrash out at their leisure.

But the diversity itself, however little we may concern curselves with explanations of it, calls for the most emphatic and unequivocal recognition on the part of all teachers and preachers of evangelical Christianity.

Probably nothing has done more to foster the antipathy with which in some quarters the doctrine of conversion is still regarded than the vulgar notion that (as Dr. Washington Gladden puts it) there is a mill to go through, and that everybody must go in at the hopper and come out at the shoot, that unless you have had the regulation experience your conversion is not genuine.[1] It may be said that this is a gross perversion of evangelical doctrine, that evangelical Christianity has always recognized the manifold varieties of experience which mark the soul's return to God. In a measure the protest is just, and yet it is impossible for Christian teachers to disclaim all responsibility for the prevalent misconceptions. To begin with, our teaching itself, all protests notwithstanding, has not always been above reproach. When, e.g., Jonathan Edwards writes in his Diary, "The chief thing that now makes me in any measure

[1] See chapter on conversion in *How much is Left of the Old Doctrines?*

question my good estate is my not having experienced conversion in those particular steps wherein the people of New England, and anciently the dissenters of Old England, used to experience it,"[1] he reveals unconsciously the peril which always besets the evangelist. With all Dr. Dale's loyalty to Moody he could not be blind to the risks involved in the stress which the latter laid upon the necessity of sudden conversion; for although Moody never denied that the soul might pass from darkness into light by a gradual transition, he assumed the other to be the normal experience, and that the supreme change would almost always be instantaneous.[2] Even when the reality of other forms of religious experience is not openly questioned, the acknowledgment of it is sometimes so grudging and halting that a definite denial would not alter the impression.[3] But whether with little reason

[1] Allen's *Jonathan Edwards*, p. 35.

[2] *Life of R. W. Dale*, by A. W. W. Dale, p. 321.

[3] E.g.: "I would not," says John Owen, "bind others by any experience of my own unless it be

or with much in the language of evangelical leaders the misconceptions to which I referred just now do undoubtedly exist. It would be easy to multiply illustrations. In one of Gladstone's early religious discussions he spoke of the Evangelical Revival as an attempt of men who felt themselves defrauded of the great living powers enshrined in the Gospel Covenant to recover those powers, and, "as it were, to ensure the possession and enjoyment of them by compressing their whole agency into a short and single crisis." "This device," he went on, "so short, so cheap, so simple, has long ago become full of cracks and

confirmed by a general rule: for one man may have an experience that another hath not. But yet," he goes on, taking away with one hand what he had just given with the other, "I think this I can say, that God generally takes possession of souls in a cloud. That is, there is some darkness upon them; they cannot tell what their state is. Sometimes they have hopes, and sometimes fears; sometimes they think things are well, and sometimes they are cast down again. This is the way whereby God generally enters into all souls" (James Moffatt's *Golden Book of John Owen*, p. 142).

fissures." In a similar vein Mr. R. H. Hutton speaks of Revivalists who, he assumes, are in the habit of teaching that "there can be no true religion without some sudden spiritual crisis such as John Wesley, e.g., dated in his own case as having happened precisely at a quarter before nine on May 24, 1738." [1] Professor James stumbles into the same pit: "For Methodism," he says, "unless there have been a crisis of this sort [i.e., 'an acute crisis of self despair and surrender followed by relief,'] salvation is only offered, not effectively received, and Christ's sacrifice in so far forth is incomplete. . . . Revivalism has always assumed that only its own type of religious experience can be perfect; you must first be nailed on the cross of natural despair and agony, and then in the twinkling of an eye be miraculously released." [2] If, then, students of religion as understanding and as sympathetic as these

[1] See Essay quoted above.

[2] *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 227–8.

manage so completely to miss their way in the interpretation of evangelical doctrine, is it any marvel if the average "outsider" finds in the mill with its hopper and shoot a sufficient figure of the conversion process? It is our business to make all such perversions, whether of the learned or the unlearned, forever impossible; and it can be done only by the unequivocal recognition of all the facts to which Christian history and experience bear witness.

There are, moreover, urgent practical reasons for this step. The value of conversion, it has been said more than once, depends not on how it happens but on what it effects. The manner of it is wholly without religious significance. But when stress is laid on this or that type of experience, immediately attention is diverted from the primary to the secondary; the true order of things is inverted; the incidental is exalted above the essential, the emotional above the ethical, the psychological above the religious. Not

only so, but this exaltation of type may easily become the minister of a subtle spiritual pride. Sudden conversion does undoubtedly, by its very nature, give to him who has experienced it a more intense and immediate sense of the reality of divine things; and when with this there mingles the thought that the very manner of the change is itself a mark of the special favour of heaven, the soil is made ready for that spiritual censoriousness which is the ugliest weed that grows in the garden of God. The worst danger, however, of our undue emphasis, is the disappointment which it inflicts on earnest seekers whose temperament practically shuts them out from any such experience as we appear to declare essential. There are many ways by which sinful man may return to God; but when we speak, or seem to speak, as if there were but one, the way by which we came ourselves, then to him who would come, but knows he cannot come by our way, we seem to say he cannot come at all. On every

ground, therefore, as well for the sake of those whom she has already won as for those whom she seeks to win, the Church must open her eyes to the manifold diversities of the Spirit's working in the human heart.

Professor Henry Drummond once stated, in a meeting of Christian workers in Scotland, that in all his wide experience of revival movements, he had seen very few evidences of that agonizing conviction of sin which was so characteristic a feature of similar movements in the past. Did it mean, he asked, that the Holy Spirit was in any way modifying the method of His operation? The question may well set us thinking: Are there not depths in Christ's saying concerning the Holy Spirit which we have not yet plumbed: "He, when He is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement"? "Conviction of sin" we know; what of "conviction of righteousness"? And yet are there not many to-day for whom the religious life begins, not so much

in a sense of their own sin and guilt and need, as rather in the consciousness of the glory and honour of Christ? It is what they find within themselves which brings some men to Christ; it is what they find in Him which brings others. Some are driven by the strong hands of stern necessity; some are wooed by the sweet constraint of the sinless Son of God. Some are crushed and broken and humbled to the dust, and their first cry is "God be merciful to me a sinner"; some when they hear the call of Christ leap up to greet Him with a new light in their eyes and the glad confession on their lips, "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." [1]

Hear then the conclusion of the whole matter. Conversion is the soul's return to God; wherefore let every man journey by the road which lies open to him. Many will come by the Slough of Despond and the

[1] I have made use in this paragraph of a few sentences from my book *The Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 142–3.

Wicket-gate, and the Hill Difficulty; but that is not the only road to the Celestial City. Many will come by ways worn by the feet of multitudes, and some by a lonely way, pilgrims of whose progress no man has yet written. But any road is the right road that reaches the goal at last. *On the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, on the west three gates*; and all the gates lead into the city.

THE RATIONALE OF CONVERSION

IV

THE RATIONALE OF CONVERSION

WE have now had steadily before us during three lectures the fact of conversion. We have passed in review and have sought to estimate the significance of a vast mass of human testimony; and we have reached this threefold conclusion: that conversion is an experience very manifold in its character, as real in its way as the facts of hearing and sight, and of deep moral significance alike for the individual and for the race. We have now to approach the subject from a somewhat different point of view. There are, according to Professor James, three great tests of the value of all religious opinions and experiences: immediate luminousness, philosophical reasonableness, and

moral helpfulness.[1] The application of the first and third of these tests to the subject of conversion has already been made; it remains now to apply the second, that, viz., of philosophical reasonableness. In other words, is it possible convincingly to connect this experience—whether of the sudden and explosive, or of the quiet and gradual type—with other experiences of common life? Can we knit it up with our thinking in other spheres, or must we be content to leave it, for all save those who have passed through it, a blank unintelligibility—a fact indeed, but a fact standing in no discoverable relation to other facts, a huge erratic boulder of whose presence in our life thought can offer no explanation?

There are doubtless some who will listen to questions of this kind with ill-disguised impatience; to them all such inquiries are wholly beside the mark. "What," they will ask, "is the good of seeking to rationalize

[1] *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 18.

an experience like conversion? Let a man get converted and he will want no explanations; rather, he will have the only kind of explanation that is worth troubling about." Nor is the rough and ready judgment without its truth, for it is the certainties of experience alone which lie beyond the questionings of the intellect. When a man falls back on his spiritual consciousness and says, "Whereas I was blind, now I see," argument is powerless to dislodge him. Onlookers may dispute as they will as to how he received his sight, their controversies are of no real concern to him: "the witness in himself he hath." It must be admitted, too, that when all has been said conversion remains very much "a psychological or theological mystery." Analogies and parallels may help us; they may enable us in some fashion to represent the idea to our minds, and to relate it with other more or less familiar ideas of experience; but they remain still only illustrations, not explanations;

life keeps the secret of its beginnings in the spiritual as in the natural world. Nevertheless, if there are any facts within our reach that can help us to a more intelligent understanding of the fact of conversion, we shall surely do well to take note of them. It is always the duty of the Church to make its faith reasonable to reasonable minds; and if there are common human experiences which have power to light up and make more intelligible to us this great experience of religion, we ought not to fail to enlist them in our service.

I

To begin with, we have a number of curious and striking "conversions out of Church," as they have been called. Heathen as well as Christian writers acknowledge the necessity of a conversion or new birth.[1] There are, Dr. Dill tells us in his work on Roman Society, well attested cases of individual conversion under pagan preaching. Polemon, the son of a rich Athenian, was a very dissolute youth, who squandered his wealth on low pleasure. Once, coming from some revel, he burst with his companions into the lecture-room of Xenocrates, who happened to be discoursing on temperance. Xenocrates calmly continued his remarks. The tipsy youth listened for a while, then flung away his garland, and with it also his evil

[1] See J. B. Mayor's *Epistle of James*, p. 189.

ways; in after years he became himself the head of the Academy. Plutarch's conception of the philosophic gathering, says the same authority, is perhaps the nearest approach which a heathen ever made to the conception of the Christian Church. He turned away in disgust from the showy declamation of the sophist whose chief object was to dazzle his audience by a display or rhetorical legerdemain on the most trivial or outworn themes, and made a profession of philosophy a real priesthood for the salvation of souls. When his discussion was over, instead of the subtle and frivolous questionings with which hearers were wont to display their own cleverness, he urged those in moral difficulty to remain behind and lay bare to him their faults and spiritual difficulties.[1]

It is, however, in certain well-known

[1] *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, pp. 347, 413. "The spiritual, in its influence on human life, is, it must be recognized, far wider than the specifically Christian. The conversion of a Buddha is equally real with the conversion of a Paul" (J. Scott Lidgett, *The Christian Religion*, p. 121).

autobiographies of our own time that we find the most suggestive of the parallels to which I refer. In *Sartor Resartus*, e.g., Thomas Carlyle describes what he calls his conversion, or new birth, when he "authentically took the Devil by the nose," and when he began to achieve the convictions, positive and negative, by which the whole of his later life was governed. "Nothing in *Sartor Resartus*," he says, "is fact; symbolical myth all, except that of the incident in the Rue St. Thomas de l'Enfer, which occurred quite literally to myself in Leith Walk, during three weeks of total sleeplessness. . . . I remember it well, and could go straight to about the place." [1] What was the nature of the incident which is thus authenticated? One paragraph will perhaps be sufficient to show: "All at once, there rose a Thought in me, and I asked myself, 'What art thou afraid of? Wherefore, like a coward, dost thou forever pip and whimper and go cowering

[1] *Carlyle's Early Life*, by J. A. Froude, chap. vii.

and trembling? Despicable biped! what is the sum-total of the worst that lies before thee? Death? Well, Death; and say the pangs of Tophet too, and all that the Devil and man may, will, or can do against thee! Hast thou not a heart; canst thou not suffer whatsoever it be; and as a Child of Freedom, though outcast, trample Tophet itself under thy feet, while it consumes thee? Let it come, then; I will meet it and defy it!' And as I so thought, there rushed like a stream of fire over my whole soul; and I shook base fear away from me for ever. I was strong, of unknown strength; a spirit, almost a god. Ever from that time, the temper of my misery was changed: not Fear or whining Sorrow was it, but Indignation and grim fire-eyed Defiance. . . . It is from this hour that I incline to date my Spiritual new birth; perhaps I directly thereupon began to be a man." [1]

[1] *Sartor Resartus*, book ii., chap. vii. "Blame not the word," he writes of conversion later on, "rejoice rather that such a word signifying such a

From Thomas Carlyle let us turn to John Stuart Mill, whose *Autobiography* records a similar mental crisis: "It was in the autumn of 1826. I was in a dull state of nerves, such as everybody is occasionally liable to; unsusceptible to enjoyment or pleasurable excitement; one of those moods when what is pleasure at other times becomes insipid or indifferent; the state, I should think, in which converts to Methodism usually are, when smitten by their first 'conviction of sin.'" Through all the months of that dreary winter the cloud hung over him. He seemed to himself like a ship stranded at the beginning of its voyage and without

thing has come to light in our Modern Era, though hidden from the wisest Ancients. The Old World knew nothing of Conversion; instead of an *Ecce Homo*, they had only some *Choice of Hercules*. It was a new-attained progress in the Moral Development of man: hereby has the Highest come home to the bosoms of the most Limited; what to Plato was but an hallucination, and to Socrates a chimera, is now clear and certain to your Zinzendorfs, your Wesleys, and the poorest of their Pietists and Methodists" (chap. x.).

sail. All the fountains of desire were dried up within him. Neither friends nor books availed him aught. He began to wonder, if, on such terms, life could be long endured. Gradually, however, the cloud lifted. The first ray of light came through the reading of Marmontel's *Mémoires*. But it was in the poems of Wordsworth that he found the best medicine for his troubled soul. These did for him what the works of other poets were powerless to do: "I felt myself," he says, "at once better and happier as I came under their influence," and "the result was that I gradually, but completely, emerged from my habitual depression, and was never again subject to it." [1]

In another of those "conversions out of Church," Wordsworth is again the chosen instrument. I take the following from "Mark Rutherford's" *Autobiography*: "One day, a day I remember as well as Paul must have remembered afterwards the day on which

[1] *Autobiography*, chap. v.

he went to Damascus, I happened to find amongst a parcel of books a volume of poems in paper boards. It was called *Lyrical Ballads*, and I read first one and then the whole book. It conveyed to me no new doctrine, and yet the change it wrought in me could only be compared with that which is said to have been wrought on Paul himself by the Divine apparition. . . . It excited a movement and a growth which went on till by degrees all the systems which enveloped me like a body gradually decayed from me and fell away into nothing. . . . God is nowhere formally deposed, and Wordsworth would have been the last man to say that he had lost faith in the God of his fathers. But his real God is not the God of the Church, but the God of the hills, the abstraction Nature; and to this my reverence was transferred. Instead of an object of worship which was altogether artificial, remote, never coming into genuine contact with me, I had now one which I thought

to be real, one in which literally I could live, move, and have my being, an actual fact present before my eyes. God was brought from that heaven of the books, and dwelt on the downs in the far-away distances, and in every cloud-shadow which wandered across the valley. Wordsworth unconsciously did for me what every religious reformer has done—he re-created my Supreme Divinity; substituting a new and living spirit for the old deity, once alive, but gradually hardened into an idol."

One further example—and this the last—may be found in George Gissing's powerful if somewhat sombre volume *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft.* One whose long hard years in London streets had obscured happy early memories of quiet rural beauty found himself one glorious day in spring amid the flowers and sunshine of Devon: "I had stepped into a new life. Between the man I had been and that which I now became there was a very notable difference.

In a single day I had matured astonishingly; which means, no doubt, that I suddenly entered into conscious enjoyment of powers and sensibilities which had been developing unknown to me. To instance only one point: till then I had cared very little about plants and flowers, but now I found myself eagerly interested in every blossom, in every growth of the wayside. . . . To me the flowers became symbolical of a great release, of a wonderful awakening. My eyes had all at once been opened; till then I had walked in darkness and knew it not."

And now again, I think, I hear the protestations of those to whose objections we were listening a few minutes ago. Is not all this, it will be asked, the very superfluity of naughtiness? Conversion is an experience specifically and exclusively Christian, and to seek to explain it by dragging in experiences of a wholly different order—intellectual, aesthetic, or whatever be the right name for them—like those just related, is

mere wantonness. Well, of course, if conversion is an experience so specifically and exclusively Christian that nothing in life presents any sort of parallel to it, there is an end of the matter; there is and can be no such thing as a rationale of conversion; we are only wasting time in talking about it. But surely this is a conclusion to which we shall not readily allow ourselves to be shut up. We may feel no necessity to relate the experiences of religion with life's other experiences; to us they may be so entirely self-luminous that we need light from no other quarter by which to interpret them. But all men are not as we are, and we owe it to our faith and to our fellows to keep open any and every approach by which it may win its way to them. Let us not, therefore, grow impatient of analogies, however far short they fall, that have in them any promise of help. You remember our English poet's plea for the religions of mankind:

Which has not taught weak wills how much they can ?
Which has not fall'n on the dry heart like rain ?
Which has not cried to sunk, self-weary man :
Thou must be born again ?

And in like manner even these "conversions out of Church"—pale ghosts of the moonlight as we may think them in comparison with the real thing—may serve to make more credible to some the Church's gospel of a new life in Jesus Christ.

II

And yet experiences such as these of Carlyle and Mill and the rest, interesting and suggestive as they are, will not carry us far towards the goal we are in search of. If we are to gain for our conception of conversion some degree of the philosophical reasonableness which Professor James postulates as a necessity for any doctrine that is to be worthy of all acceptation, it must be through the discovery of some general and well recognized law under which our conversion phenomena may be grouped.

Now we are all familiar with the way in which a man's whole life organizes itself, so to speak, around some idea, or group of ideas, which happens for the moment to be in the ascendancy. His thoughts, his interests, his anxieties, are all determined by the char-

acter of the ruling idea which for the time exercises authority over him. When, e.g.—to borrow one of Professor James' happy illustrations—the President of the United States, with paddle, gun, and fishing-rod, goes camping in the wilderness for a vacation, he changes his system of ideas from top to bottom. The presidential anxieties have lapsed into the background entirely; the official habits are replaced by the habits of a son of nature, and those who knew the man only as the strenuous magistrate would not "know him for the same person" if they saw him as the camper.[1] Similarly, we know how the entering in of some new and regnant idea may end in a complete and permanent readjustment of a man's whole life, of all his thoughts and ways. This is the meaning of Dr. Chalmers' famous phrase, "the expulsive power of a new affection." The new idea has power to create a new centre of personal activity and (to use

[1] *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 193.

again the phrase which was used just now) to organize the whole life about itself. Illustrations may be found on every hand. Some years ago a crisis occurred in the political life of England. The leading statesman of the day introduced in the House of Commons a measure which led to an immediate and disastrous division in the ranks of his own party. What was the result? For many of those who broke the party bond, opposition to the ill-starred measure became the governing principle of their political life: it forced them into new alliances; it modified their relation to most of the other political questions of the hour; it shifted, consciously or unconsciously, the bias of their thinking, and in the end many of them became politically new men.

But it is within the sphere of personal relations that we find the most signal examples of what I have been saying. Great is the power of ideas; but it is when these ideas are incarnated for us in living men

and women that they put forth their full might. A youth is pushed to the brink of some terrible temptation; one thought steadies and saves him: "How shall I do this great wickedness and yet keep her love?" A girl is giddy and idle and vain; she becomes a mother, and the feeling of motherhood creates a new centre about which a new life builds itself up; the love of a little child has redeemed her. Our great imaginative writers understand the meaning of these things. What, e.g., are the moral recoveries of Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables*, and of Sidney Carton in *The Tale of Two Cities*, and of the selfish old peer in the child's story of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, but so many instances of the redeeming might of human love?[1] It is strange, sometimes, at how light a touch the door of the spirit opens, and lo! God is there: "A man now old and nearing his end one Sunday November

[1] I am indebted for these three examples to Bishop Gore. See his Appendix to *Lux Mundi* on "The Christian Doctrine of Sin."

afternoon, when he was but twenty years old, met a woman in a London street and looked in her face. Neither he nor she stopped for an instant; he looked in her face, passed on, and never saw her again. He married, had children who now have children, but that woman's face has never left him, and the colours of the portrait which hangs in his soul's oratory are as vivid as ever. A thousand times has he appealed to it; a thousand times has it sat in judgment; and a thousand times has its sacred beauty redeemed him." [1] For some this is perhaps a hard saying, and they are not able to receive it, and yet who does not know how along unseen wires another's soul may flash its mystic message to his own and make for him the dawning of a better day?

Only—but this is rare—
When a belovéd hand is laid in ours,
When jaded with the rush and glare
Of the interminable hours,
Our eyes can in another's eyes read clear,
When our world-deafen'd ear

[1] Mark Rutherford's *Miriam's Schooling*, p. 119.

Is by the tones of a loved voice caress'd—
A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.
A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
And hears its winding murmur; and he sees
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze.[1]

It is in the line of experiences such as these that conversion finds its place. It is the supreme illustration of the reorganization of life about a new centre, the crowning example of redemption by a person. Again I say, I do not mean that herein lies the whole philosophy of conversion, but enough to save the doctrine from the charge of irrationality. If by the admission into his political creed of some new article of faith a man's whole outlook is changed and in the end he becomes politically another self, who will set limits to the change which a new thought of God may work through all the reaches of his being? If we read in a work of fiction how some man looked for the first

[1] *The Buried Life*, by Matthew Arnold.

time into a woman's face and knew that for him life from that hour was charged with a new purpose, we should not put down the book with a gesture of impatience, because we know that such things do happen. Why, then, should it seem a thing incredible that by the sudden crossing of a human life by the Son of God, old things should pass away, all things should become new? It is this personal commerce of the soul with Christ Himself in conversion that calls for special emphasis. I have heard of one whose whole life was changed through the weekly reading during three months of the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. And when we remember what vital moral forces are stored within the compass of those few verses, we find nothing in the story to stumble at. But in conversion the soul is dealing not merely with moral ideas, however mighty, but with Christ Himself. It is brought within the sphere of those personal relations through which, as we have seen, the supreme trans-

formations of life are wrought. A very simple illustration will show what is meant. There lived once a young girl whose perfect grace of character was the wonder of those who knew her. She wore on her neck a gold locket which no one was ever allowed to open. One day, in a moment of unusual confidence, one of her companions was allowed to touch its spring and learn its secret. She saw written these words—"*Whom having not seen, I love.*" That was the secret of her beautiful life. And that, too, be it said, is the secret of Christianity: it is redemption through a Person. Religion is not magical, it is reasonable; and when once we have learned to think of it, not so much in terms of a creed to be believed as rather of a personal relationship to be shared, immediately we realize the true nature of the forces which through it are set free, and the consequent reasonableness of the Church's doctrine of conversion.

III

But how, it may be asked, can we defend the doctrine of *sudden* conversion? That character should be slowly modified under the steady impact of the forces of the spiritual world—that we can understand; but that in a single day, a single hour, without warning or preparation, the government of a man's life should pass into other hands, and he himself become literally a new creation—this is altogether beyond our comprehension. And when, e.g., we find a man saying, as Lacordaire does, "I was unbelieving in the evening, on the morrow a Christian, certain with an invincible certainty," we can only throw up our hands in despair, and ask with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" As we shall see in the next lecture, sudden conversion is a phenomenon concerning which modern psychology has sug-

gestions of its own to offer. Passing these by for the moment, however, let us see if in the direction already indicated there be not help awaiting us.

And, first of all, let us ask, if sudden conversion does really involve such a break with experience as is often assumed. Are they so entirely disparate from all else that we know that their very isolation may justly create a prejudice against them? In reply, I will ask you to consider some weighty words of Benjamin Jowett: "If," he says, "while acknowledging that a great proportion of mankind are the creatures of habit, and that a great part of our actions are nothing more than the result of habit, we go on to ask ourselves about the changes of our life, and fix our minds on the critical points, we are led to view human nature in a way more accordant with the language of scripture. We no longer measure ourselves by days or by weeks; we are conscious that at particular times we have undergone great

revolutions or emotions; and then, again, have intervened periods, lasting perhaps for years, in which we have pursued the even current of our way. Our progress towards good may have been in idea an imperceptible and regular advance; in fact we know it to have been otherwise. We have taken plunges in life; there are many eras noted in our existence. . . . Changes in character come more often in the form of feeling than of reason, from some new affection or attachment, or alienation of our former self, rather than from the slow growth of experience, or a deliberate sense of right and duty." [1]

When, moreover, conversion is given the place which rightly belongs to it—within the sphere of personal relations, i.e.—the most elementary knowledge will teach us that within that sphere the time factor is of all factors the least considerable. When two souls really touch, that may happen with

[1] Essay quoted above, pp. 119, 121.

which neither many words nor the ticking of the clock have aught to do. "Love at first sight" is often a thoughtless phrase, lightly used; but love at first sight is more than a phrase, it is a fact, it is a real experience in human life. And sometimes, with all reverence be it spoken, there is love at first sight betwixt the soul and its Lord. Is not this the simple fact which lies behind some of the stories of the life of Jesus? Take, e.g., the call of Nathanael to be a disciple. A few short verses tell the whole story. Here is a man who, so far as we know, had never seen Jesus before. A friend brings him into His presence, and at a word, he capitulates. Prejudices—and prejudices we know he had—are swept aside, and in a moment—so at least it would seem—the decision of a lifetime is taken. How unreasoning and unreasonable it all sounds! What depth of conviction, we ask, could there be in one who suffered himself to be swung clean round in such so easy fashion? But,

waiving for the moment the question of the completeness of the evangelist's narrative—though many things must have passed between Jesus and Nathanael which John has not recorded—we may be quite sure that that which won the disciple to the Master's side and grappled him to Him as with hooks of steel, was not merely something which Jesus said, and which another listening could report; rather it was a something which went forth from Him, forth from His eyes, from His heart, from His whole being, a subtle magnetic something, which cast its spell about Nathanael and bound him for ever to the Man of Nazareth—that touch of soul with soul to which all things are possible. There are moments in which the work of a lifetime is done; there are experiences which crowd eternity into an hour, or which stretch an hour into eternity; and such an hour, such a moment, was it in the life of Nathanael when first he stood in the presence of Jesus.

I quoted just now some words of Benjamin Jowett. Let me add to them the words of another whose still greater distance from the evangelical interpretation of Christianity gives to his judgment a peculiar significance. "There is no single thing," says F. W. Newman, "which more strikes me as indicating a defective philosophy current concerning the Soul, than the incredulity and contempt which is cast upon *sudden* conversions. Sudden political revolutions are never treated as incredible or marvellous. It is readily understood that in a State two or three different powers are struggling together with independent force; and often with alternate success. At last a party which was depressed rises in sudden might, deposes that which held the chief power, and assumes the helm. Many moralizers seem not to be aware that, similarly, in the narrow compass of one man's bosom, two or three powers are often striving together for mastery. Rather they know of nothing but 'Reason

and Passion'; and as Reason acts gently and very steadily, and only Passion by violent impulse, they can understand indeed that a man may fall into dire sin all in a moment, but not how he can rise out of it all in a moment. This is because they know nothing of the forces of the Soul, which are in fact true Passions themselves. . . . Indeed the remark may be made on all *intuitive* impressions—that they are at first sudden and impulsive. The beauty of a scene, of a statue, of a human face, strikes us with impetus. Not that we discern it always at first sight: we may have needed some familiarity with it before we see it in the right position, and gather up into a single whole that on which the effect depends: but at last we catch it all in a moment, and perhaps wonder why it never so affected us before." [1]

[1] *The Soul*, chap. ii.

IV

One word only remains to be spoken, and that is the word not of a theologian but of a poet. Students of Robert Browning have often called attention to the persistence with which he dwells on the spiritual significance of those rare moments by which the souls of men are visited, when a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun shines about their path and the very voice of God is heard. Almost anything may serve to be the medium of the divine message. "There are some mortals on this earth to whom nothing more than a certain summer morning very early, or a certain chance idea in a lane ages ago, or a certain glance from a fellow-creature dead for years, has been the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, or the Descent of the

Holy Ghost." [1] This is the faith of Robert Browning, and at its root it is one with the Church's doctrine of conversion. Indeed, one enthusiastic expositor of the poet's teaching does not hesitate to declare that his teaching on conversion is "his supreme message to our time"; it is this that ranks him with the prophets—"his impassioned confidence that the soul may, in one grand moment, leap sheer out of any depth of shame or subtle bondage, and leap to the breast of God." [2]

> Oh, we're sunk enough here, God knows!
> But not quite so sunk that moments,
> Sure tho' seldom, are denied us,
> When the spirit's true endowments
> Stand out plainly from its false ones,
> And apprise it if pursuing

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[1] *Miriam's Schooling*, p. 118.

[2] See Mr. J. A. Hutton's admirable little volume, *Guidance from Robert Browning in Matters of Faith*, to which throughout the whole of this section of my lecture I am greatly indebted. Dr. Washington Gladden makes a similar application of the poet's teaching in his *How Much is Left of the Old Doctrines?* See also Professor Corson's book referred to below.

Or the right way or the wrong way,
To its triumph or undoing.

There are flashes struck from midnights,
There are fire-flames noondays kindle,
Whereby piled-up honours perish,
Whereby swollen ambitions dwindle,
While just this or that poor impulse,
Which for once had play unstifled,
Seems the sole work of a lifetime
That away the rest have trifled.[1]

Or take those great lines from *The Ring and the Book* in which the Pope passes judgment on Guido—Guido the infamous:

For the main criminal I have no hope
Except in such a suddenness of fate.
I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all:
But the night's black was burst through by a blaze—
Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,
Through her whole length of mountain visible:
There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.
So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.

Still more striking is the lovely story of Pippa, the little silk-winder of Asolo. It is New Year's day, her one holiday in the whole long year:

[1] *Cristina.*

> To-morrow I must be Pippa who winds silk
> The whole year round, to earn just bread and milk:
> But, this one day, I have leave to go
> And play out my fancy's fullest games;

and so she wanders forth into the sunshine, singing as she goes. First she passes, in the morning, the house on the hillside, where the guilty pair, Ottima and her lover Sebald, are met; then, at noon she reaches the house to which this day Jules the sculptor will bring home his bride; in the evening she is near the turret on the hill above Asolo where dwell Luigi and his mother, and at night she passes the palace by the Duomo in which Monsignor the Bishop is conferring with his Intendant. Pippa does not know it, but to each of these a great crisis has come; each is standing at the parting of the ways: "Ottima and Sebald unrepentant, with a crime behind them; Jules and Phene, two souls brought strangely face to face by a fate which may prove their salvation or their perdition; Luigi, irresolute, with a purpose to be performed; Mon-

signor, undecided, before a great temptation." [1] And as Pippa passes, singing, something in the song wakens within each the slumbering better self, and each is saved. Let Sebald speak for the rest.

> God's in His heaven;
> All's right with the world!

—this was Pippa's song, and this is Sebald's answer:

> That little peasant's voice
> Has righted all again. Though I be lost,
> I know which is the better, never fear,
> Of vice or virtue, purity or lust,
> Nature or trick! I see what I have done,
> Entirely now! Oh, I am proud to feel
> Such torments—let the world take credit thence—
> I, having done my deed, pay too its price!
> . . . God's in His heaven!

This is what the poetry of Browning says everywhere, that—as Professor Corson puts it—"not through knowledge, not through a sharpened intellect, but through repentance, through conversion, through wheeling into a new centre its spiritual system, the soul attains to saving truth." [2]

[1] Arthur Symons' *Introduction to Browning*, p. 48.
[2] *Introduction to Browning*, p. 58.

Nor does Browning ever forget—how could he?—that the master forces of life are personal; hence what he shows us is not conversion simply, but conversion through personality. One illustration must suffice. Take the story of Giuseppe Caponsacchi in *The Ring and the Book*. Caponsacchi was a priest, and withal a coxcomb and a fribble; the Church's holy hands had left unchanged the worldling's withered heart. Then Pompilia—Guido's wronged but stainless girl-wife—crossed his path, laid her commands on him, and trusted him; and Caponsacchi became a new man. This is how he tells what happened to his judges:

"Thought?" Nay, sirs, what shall follow was not thought:
I have thought sometimes, and thought long and hard.
I have stood before, gone round a serious thing,
Tasked my whole mind to touch and clasp it close,
As I stretch forth my arm to touch this bar.
God and man, and what duty I owe both—
I dare to say I have confronted these
In thought; but no such faculty helped here.
I put forth no thought—powerless, all that night
I paced the city; it was the first Spring.

By the invasion I lay passive to,
In rush'd new things, the old were rapt away;
Alike abolished—the imprisonment
Of the outside air, the inside weight o' the world
That pulled me down. Death meant, to spurn the ground,
Soar to the sky—die well, and you do that.

* * * * *

Sirs, I obeyed. Obedience was too strange—
This new thing that had been struck into me
By the look o' the lady—to dare disobey
The first authoritative word. 'Twas God's.
I had been lifted to the level of her,
Could take such sounds into my sense. I said,
"We two are cognisant o' the Master now;
She it is bids me bow the head; how true,
I am a priest! I see the function here;
I thought the other way self-sacrifice:
This is the true, seals up the perfect sum.
I pay it, sit down, silently obey."

Browning, it is plain, is not afraid of sudden spiritual upheavals; he believes in them; the tiniest spark may fire the brain, and in the shock which follows,

> God unmakes but to remake the soul
> He else made first in vain.

In all this, once more let it be said, there is no clearing up of the mystery of conversion. When we compare what happens in conversion with the sudden re-direction

that is given to a life by some chance incident, we are but comparing one mystery with another, and each remains a mystery still. Of many of these changes, perhaps, no other reason can be given than that Nature and the Author of Nature have made men capable of them. And yet, at the same time, this correlating of the experiences of religion with some of the familiar experiences of life may not be in vain. It may teach us to see in the phenomena of the spiritual world, not the portents of some almighty magician, but the activities of the same divine mind which is at work in all our life. Mysterious they will still remain, but not more mysterious than many other things before which we daily stand with thankful hearts and bowed heads—thankful yet silent:

I was dumb, I opened not my mouth;
Because Thou didst it.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONVERSION

V

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONVERSION

REFERENCE was made in a former lecture to the claim upon science of the facts of the religious consciousness, and to the response which that claim is winning to-day from many distinguished students of psychology.[1] The movement to which I refer, recent as it is, is attracting attention in so many quarters, and promises to yield such an abundant literary crop, that it seems worth while pausing to ask what aid it can give us in our interpretation of the facts which form the subject matter of these lectures.

[1] See p. 40

I

Let me begin with a brief account of the aims, methods, and results of the new psychological study of religion. It assumes that religion is a real fact of human experience, and that it develops according to law. "Here," it says, in effect, "in the experiences of men and women about us is a great mass of ascertainable states of consciousness. These it is the business of science to observe with all the precision that modern psychological methods render possible. To understand religion we must study it in its present manifestations." In making this inquiry the psychologist is concerned solely with the facts as such; their ultimate significance lies wholly without the scope of his judgment. He rejects equally the position of those to whom conversion is an absolutely super-

natural event with nothing cognate to it in ordinary psychology, and of those who see nothing in it but hysterics and emotionalism, an absolutely pernicious pathological disturbance. His one aim is to trace in the facts of the spiritual life the working of those same orderly processes which experience has taught him to look for everywhere; and while he does not forget that the laws of the spiritual world are peculiar to their own sphere, and are therefore not necessarily one with those which obtain in other spheres, he nevertheless believes that the facts have an order which in due time will reveal itself to the patient seeker.

In pursuing his inquiry the psychologist claims for his own the whole field of religious experience. Hitherto, however, it is upon the phenomena of conversion that his most abundant labours have been bestowed, and it is, of course, with the results of these alone that we are at this moment concerned. Keeping before him the whole series of mani-

festations just preceding, accompanying, and immediately following conversion, the psychologist seeks to discover the mental and spiritual processes which are at work therein. As we might expect, his attention is especially drawn to the manifold varieties of conversion which were the subject of an earlier lecture and, as we shall see in a moment, he believes he holds, from the human side, the only clue to the problem which they present to us.[1]

In order to obtain the facts which form the raw material for the investigation various methods have been adopted. The biographies and autobiographies of religious persons have been examined (every one will remember how largely these figure in the lectures of Professor James); individual converts have been interrogated as to their experiences, and the results recorded. Pro-

[1] These paragraphs are merely a summary of the aims of the psychological study of religion as these are set forth in the writings of Coe, Starbuck and James.

fessor Coe tells us that he had a number of persons placed under careful scrutiny with a view to securing objective evidence as to temperament, the observers being guided by a carefully prepared scheme of temperamental manifestations.[1] In some cases further aid was sought by means of interviews with friends or acquaintances of the persons under examination. The method most commonly adopted, however, is that of the *questionnaire*, as it is called. By means of an elaborate and carefully prepared list of questions (examples of which may be seen in many of the works referred to in this lecture) a detailed description is obtained from hundreds of persons of their conversion experiences, the motives that led up to it, the circumstances that attended it, and the effects that followed from it. These descriptions are then analyzed and the results are grouped and massed in

[1] *The Spiritual Life*, p. 109.

various ways so as to exhibit averages and tendencies in religious life.

The movement, as I have said, is still but in its infancy. One of the first to break ground in this new field was Professor Leuba, whose article on "The Psychology of Religious Phenomena" appeared in *The American Journal of Psychology*, in April, 1896. Professor Starbuck's similar but much more elaborate investigations—*The Psychology of Religion*—were published in 1899. In 1900 came Professor G. A. Coe's *Spiritual Life*, and in 1902 Professor James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, which my predecessor in this lectureship (Dr. Watson) once spoke of as "the most scientific book on the phenomena of the religious consciousness which has ever been published." All these, it will be observed, are the work of American students. From Professor Henri Bois of Montauban, I observe, have just come two volumes, one on the Welsh Revival, the other on the Psychology of Revivals; but of

these I am not able to speak.[1] British scholarship, so far as I am aware, has not yet entered the field.[2]

And what are the results of this study of conversion by the methods of psychology? I can answer the question only in the baldest and most summary fashion. Keeping steadily in view their task of co-ordinating specific inner states and tendencies and specific external circumstances, students of the psychology of religious experiences believe they have reached at least two well-established conclusions. In the first place, they tell us, that when in conversion a man's personality is changed, it is, as Professor James would say, his psychological idiosyncrasies which give the particular shape to his metamorphosis. Suppose converting influences brought

[1] See a short notice by Dr. James Stalker in *The Expository Times*, January, 1908.

[2] I have not overlooked Mr. Frank Granger's *Soul of a Christian;* but though, like R. L. Stevenson's *Child World*, it is "full of a number of things," and these often very interesting, it does not seem to me to add materially to the discussion.

to bear upon one in whom these three factors combine: pronounced emotional sensibility, tendency to automatisms, and susceptibility to hypnotic suggestion—if he yield, you may confidently predict that such a man will experience a transformation of the sudden and striking order. In the degree, however, in which these characteristics are wanting, the likelihood of his passing through a change of this marked character is reduced, no matter what the depth and reality of his religious convictions. In a word—such is Professor Coe's conclusion—the varying emotional aspects of our religious experiences are to be ascribed not to the inscrutable ways of God, but to ascertainable differences in men's mental constitutions.[1] Professor James reaches practically the same conclusion, though he states it somewhat differently: "What makes the difference between a sudden and a gradual convert is not necessarily the presence of divine miracle in the

[1] *The Spiritual Life*, p. 140.

case of one and of something less divine in that of the other, but rather a simple psychological peculiarity, the fact, namely, that in the recipient of the more instantaneous grace we have one of those subjects who are in possession of a large region in which mental work can go on subliminally, and from which invasive experiences, abruptly upsetting the equilibrium of the primary consciousness, may come." [1]

Another matter upon which modern psychology pronounces with equal confidence is the intimate correspondence which has been shown to exist between conversion and those momentous physical and mental changes which mark the passing of childhood into youth and manhood. Returns of the various ages at which conversion takes place have been secured on a considerable scale by different investigators, and though, of course, the results do not always agree, certain conclusions stand out with well de-

[1] *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 237.

fined clearness: that conversion takes place usually between the ages of ten and twenty-five, most frequently about sixteen or seventeen, very rarely after thirty, and on an average, somewhat earlier in girls than in boys.[1] In other words, the critical period in religious development is seen to coincide in a very remarkable degree with the storm and stress of adolescence. Indeed, many psychologists, believing that man is naturally religious, look upon the religious anxieties of youth as one of the normal manifestations of the adolescent period. The well-known uneasiness and ferment of the physical life have their correlate in the scarcely less familiar upheavals and agonies of the spiritual.

[1] Elaborate statistics and diagrams may be found in the works of Starbuck and Coe. See also Pratt's *Psychology of Religious Belief*, p. 218.

II

This brief outline, wofully inadequate as it is, may serve to indicate some of the results for religion of recent psychological research. What, now, is to be our attitude, as Christians, towards this new study? To say that we will not oppose it will probably only provoke from science the prompt retort, "Thank you for nothing!" Certain it is, whether we like it or dislike it, the study will go on as long as it holds out to the inquirer the smallest promise of reward for his labours. Nothing short of an absolute conviction that he was ploughing the sands of the seashore would or ought to induce him to stay his hand. But, indeed, religion not only has no interest in opposing the application of the

methods of psychology to the facts of the spiritual life, she has every reason for welcoming and encouraging it. Has it not been a just ground of complaint with us that science, which is so quick to seize upon all other facts, has treated *our* facts—the facts of the religious consciousness—with cold disdain? It would be strange indeed therefore, if, now that in real earnest and according to her own proper methods she is taking up the task, religion were to cry "Hands off!" or to persist in regarding her as an unauthorized intruder.

Nor need we fear lest, in passing through the hands and under the eyes of the psychologist, spiritual facts should lose any of their essential significance. What happens in conversion is not less divine after science has given such account of it as it can than it was before. Suppose, e.g., we accept the psychologist's conclusions as to the possible subjects of a sudden and striking religious transformation, are we therefore shut up

to the further conclusion that the whole change is explicable in terms of emotional sensibility and so forth? Certainly not. The utmost that has been proved is that a certain type of man is necessary to a certain type of conversion; but (as Professor Coe well says) the substance of the experience as far transcends its emotional forms as a man transcends the clothes he wears.[1] Or, suppose again science should succeed in demonstrating the concomitance which it believes to exist between conversion and the crisis of adolescence, would the legitimate inference be that conversion is merely a product of physical factors? Again we answer,

[1] So also Professor James: "His possession of a developed subliminal self, and of a leaky or pervious margin, is thus a *conditio sine quâ non* of the Subject's becoming converted in the instantaneous way. But if you, being orthodox Christians, ask me as a psychologist whether the reference of a phenomenon to a subliminal self does not exclude the notion of the direct presence of the Deity altogether, I have to say frankly that as a psychologist I do not see why it necessarily should" (p. 242).

certainly not. All that science is seeking to prove is the concomitance of two groups of facts and (to quote Professor Coe again) this particular instance of such concomitance between mental and physical facts is no more fitted to give comfort to materialism than any other instance of the correlation of brain states with mental states.[1] What science looks for among the facts of the spiritual world is that which it looks for everywhere —the signs of law and order. If these should be found here also, will the facts therefore be less truly God's facts? Are we going to commit ourselves once more to the old and stupid notion, "the more law and order the less God,"[2] that it is only the abnormal that is divine, that the moment you can account for anything that moment you withdraw it from the sphere of the divine activity? Things are what they are, however they came to be what they are; and divine

[1] *The Spiritual Life*, p. 47.
[2] The phrase is Dr. Bowne's.

things are not less divine because the history of their development turns out to be different from what we once thought it. The world in which we live is not the world that Dante and Milton knew, but it is still God's world. The Bible that we read is different from the Bibles of the Reformers, but it is still God's word. And if in the facts of conversion and regeneration our children are led to trace the sequence of laws which are hidden from our eyes, why should we doubt that still behind all there is the same divine Lord who worketh all things according to the good pleasure of His will?

It is only fair to add that psychologists who are most active in this new field of inquiry energetically repudiate the idea that these conclusions can in any way affect the reality of the divine agency in conversion. Let Professor Coe speak both for himself and his fellow-workers: "Empirical methods do not reduce the facts of the religious life to the plane of the natural as con-

trasted with the supernatural. Every question arising in the psychology of religious experience may be understood in this way. Under what circumstances does the Divine Spirit work such or such a change in the minds of men? That the Holy Spirit does observe antecedents and wait for conditions to ripen; that He does not vouchsafe the same blessings to all individuals or to all ages of life; and that we have it in our power either to prepare the way for His revelations or to hinder them—all this is current belief among Christians. Now, these are the very uniformities that need investigating. In fact, psychology can only render more precise and complete what is already recognized in a partial way in the practice of the religious life. Yet the results will not be doctrinal in the ordinary sense of the term. They will be merely statements of uniformity existing between certain antecedents and certain consequents, and will leave entirely open the vast field of questions regarding the

Divine purposes toward men and regarding man's real nature and destiny." [1]

[1] *The Spiritual Life*, p. 17. See also p. 118; Cutten's *Psychology of Alcoholism*, p. 317, and the passage from James quoted above.

III

While, however, it is our plain duty to abandon all attempts in the name of religion to browbeat science and all equally foolish fears of it, this does not mean that we are to shut our eyes and open our mouths and take whatever science, or science falsely so-called, may be pleased to give us. Least of all has so young a science as the psychology of religion any right of complaint if its first advances are met with a mild and reasonable scepticism. Without entering into detailed criticism two or three brief notes may be added to show the need at this stage of a cautious if sympathetic attitude.

(1) To begin with, there is the fact already alluded to, the extreme youth of the science itself. Perhaps, indeed, it would not be unfair to suggest that as yet it is not a science

but only the hope of one. When Professor Leuba wrote his article on "The Psychology of Religious Phenomena," as recently as 1896, he declared that the manifestations of the religious life were a domain in which psychological science had not then planted its standard. When Professor Starbuck, then a student of Harvard, first set on foot his statistical inquiries into the religious ideas and experiences of the people around him, the results of which have since been given to the world, even Professor James (as he himself has confessed) damned the whole project with faint praise.[1] "This is not a sphere," says Professor Coe, "in which claims to scientific infallibility become even plausible."[2] Moreover, the investigators are as yet comparatively few; American students, as I have said, have hitherto had the field almost to themselves. Any one who

[1] See his Preface to Starbuck's *Psychology of Religion.*

[2] *The Spiritual Life*, p. 119.

has the slightest acquaintance with the literature of the subject must have been struck with the way in which the writers lean one upon another. Before the results of their labours can be accepted with complete confidence we must be able to check them by the findings of other workers in other parts of the same field.

(2) We cannot help feeling, too, that the *questionnaire* method which figures so largely in these investigations is a somewhat rickety foundation for the weight of conclusions which it is made to bear. It might, indeed, seem that nothing could be more simple and straightforward, when we desire to know the facts of religious experience, than to go direct to religious people themselves and let them describe in their own way their own inner life. A little reflection, however, will show us that comparatively few persons are equal to the task of accurate self-observation and portrayal. So far from being an art which comes naturally to every one, it needs long

and careful cultivation before it can be trusted. A man may be both intellectually honest and religiously sincere, and yet as soon as he attempts to read off in detail the facts of his own inner life he may be the unconscious victim of all manner of subtle self-deceptions: the conventionalities of religious formulae, the tricks of memory, the processes of self-praise and self-blame—all mean so much to be deducted from the face value of his account. That the students of the psychology of religion are themselves aware of these drawbacks to their method is true; whether, in their conclusions, they have sufficiently allowed for them is a question on which opinions are likely to differ.

(3) But the most serious criticism, from the point of view of religion, of the psychological study of religious experience is—to put it bluntly—that it is just the religious element in the experiences which it analyzes about which psychology has nothing to say. Professor James calls his book "The Varieties

of Religious Experience," and yet it would hardly be unfair to say that he does not deal with *religious* experience at all. A man may fill reams of paper in discussing the emotional factors which combined to make possible the experience which befel St. Paul on the road to Damascus, but if he ignore the central facts of divine forgiveness and fellowship which became the strength of the Apostle's life and the source of all his activities, he has left out the only elements in the experience to which a Christian at least would give the name " religious " at all. And, with all his cleverness, it must be confessed this is what Professor James seems to have done. This unconcern about everything save the mere fringes of religious emotionalism comes out in various ways. Critics of Professor James' book have often complained of the unhappy prominence which he gives to abnormal and sometimes grotesque developments of the religious life. But if we remember the psychologist's point

of view this is only just what we might expect. Professor Leuba, e.g., says plainly that in selecting the material by which to illustrate his conclusions he limited himself "to sudden and well-marked cases," for this reason, "that violent psychic phenomena by their very emphasis bring to light what remains obscure in less intense and slower events."[1] Exactly; but a "sudden and well-marked" case of conversion has *per se* no more *religious* value than any other kind of conversion, and the only reason why it is of more worth to the psychologist is that it throws into sharper relief the purely psychic factors which are his first and last concern. A short paragraph from one of Professor James' lectures will, I think, put this beyond dispute: "To find religion," he says, "is only one out of many ways of reaching unity; and the process of remedying inner incompleteness and reducing inner discord is a general psychological process,

[1] Essay referred to above, p. 312.

which may take place with any sort of mental material and need not necessarily assume the religious form. In judging of the religious types of regeneration which we are about to study, it is important to recognize that they are only one species of a genus that contains other types as well. For example, the new birth may be away from religion into incredulity; or it may be from moral scrupulosity into freedom and licence; or it may be produced by the irruption into the individual's life of some new stimulus or passion, such as love, ambition, cupidity, revenge, or patriotic devotion. In all these instances we have precisely the same psychological form of event,—a firmness, stability, and equilibrium succeeding a period of storm and stress and inconsistency. In these non-religious cases the new man may also be born either gradually or suddenly." [1] The meaning of this is unmistakable, and it abundantly confirms what has already been said,

[1] *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 175.

viz., that psychology deals only with those elements in religious experiences which are common to them and other experiences, but that that in them which gives them their distinctive character and their whole value—the religious element, i.e.—lies wholly outside its province.

IV

Must we conclude, therefore, that faith has in this matter nothing to learn from science? I do not think so. I proceed, therefore, in this closing section of my lecture, very briefly to indicate some of the gains with which psychology promises to enrich religion.

(1) It is something that we have secured so stalwart a witness to the fact that man is essentially a religious being. There was a time, and that not so long ago, when even to well-instructed men it seemed a sufficient account of religion to set it down as an invention of priests. In Gibbon's eyes all religions were equally useful for the statesman and equally false for the philosopher. Psychology has done its part in helping to make an end of all such crudities of thought

for the future. We know now that religion is not a something imposed by authority from without; it is from within, a growth of the spirit, as native to the soul of man as his sense of wonder or his instinct for society. Set yourself to answer the question, "What is man?" and psychology will say to you that if you answer the question in any way that leaves out the religious manifestations of arrival at adult life, you beg the answer by ignoring the most palpable facts.[1] Many of you will recall a striking essay in which Mr. John Fiske, speaking as an evolutionist, declares his belief that of all the implications of the doctrine of evolution with regard to man, the very deepest and strongest is that which asserts the everlasting reality of religion.[2] It is a kindred testimony which in its own different fashion is borne by modern psychology.

(2) But it is, probably, in the field of practi-

[1] *The Spiritual Life*, p. 54.
[2] *Through Nature to God*, p. 191.

cal Christian work that the value of the new study of religion will be most clearly seen. Take, e.g., its insistence on the intimate relation between general temperamental characteristics and particular types of religious experience. The sudden, explosive conversion, and the conversion which is rather a process than an event, have each alike their psychological justification; by inference, so likewise have the religious methods adopted to bring each about. Once this truth is clearly seen and firmly grasped we may expect that it will work out a twofold result of great practical importance. On the one hand, it will help to remove a very real stumbling-block from the feet of some for whom a single type of conversion, and that for them an impossible type, has the authority of a universal standard. And, on the other hand, evangelists and other Christian workers will realize, with a certain sense of relief, that the strongly marked experiences of many converts are not to be

sought for in all; and further, they will learn to look with thankful rather than with suspicious eyes on methods of Christian work which seek the same goal but reach it by different paths.[1]

(3) Not less timely is the new emphasis with which psychology proclaims to us the significance for religion of the period of adolescence. The general findings of investigators in this matter have already been given. "Conversion," says Starbuck, "is a distinctively adolescent phenomenon"; and he even goes so far as to add that if it has not occurred before twenty the chances are small that it will ever be experienced.[2]

Now, in a way, we have always known these things. We have always known that

[1] I take the opportunity, in this connexion, of calling attention to a pamphlet entitled *Christian Training and the Revival as Methods of Converting Men*, by the President of Oberlin College, Dr. H. C. King. The clearness with which Dr. King sees, and the firmness with which he handles, some of the most urgent practical problems of the modern Church is beyond praise.

[2] *The Psychology of Religion*, p. 28.

youth is the formative period, that in youth all the great life choices are made. Most men settle what their life work is to be before they are out of their teens; and, what is of equal and sometimes greater importance, most men have chosen their life partner before they are half-way through their twenties. It is only natural, therefore, that the crises of personal religious history should be looked for within this same period. Just as—if I may borrow a homely illustration—when it is desired that the fire in a furnace should burn more briskly, we open the draught door and thereby admit the oxygen which has all along been enveloping the furnace and only waiting for an opportunity to be used in the work of combustion, so physical changes occurring at adolescence, while they do not produce religion, do, nevertheless, open new doors whereby the ever-present divine Spirit may enter the mind and heart more fully than ever before.[1] In

[1] The illustration is Professor Coe's.

a way, I say, we have always known this. Now comes psychology to strengthen our convictions with the confirmations of science, to tell us that it is in the yeasty days of youth that the Church's great opportunity comes, and to warn us, with a new solemnity of emphasis, of the risks we run if the opportunity be let slip.

(4) Finally, psychology is teaching us the need of a more patient and individual study of the nature of the soul to which, through the offices of religion, we seek to minister. As long ago as 1873 Henry Drummond read an essay before a Theological Society in Edinburgh in which he maintained that the study of the soul in health and disease ought to be as much an object of scientific study and training as the health and diseases of the body. "To draw souls one by one, to button-hole them and steal from them the secret of their lives, to talk them clean out of themselves, to read them off like a page of print, to pervade them with your spiritual

essence and make them transparent, this," he said, "is the spiritual science which is so difficult to acquire and so hard to practise." [1] We have been too apt to assume that earnestness could compensate for ignorance, that a warm heart could make good the deficiencies of an untaught hand. One trembles to think of the souls that have perished at the birth because, in that supreme hour, they had no better care than uninstructed zeal could give. Souls that are sick have need of a physician, of a physician fitted alike by sympathy and skill to divine their needs and to minister to them. But alas! the physicians of religious perplexity have too often been Job's comforters, without understanding; and so the souls in doubt who, as one has well said, should have been gathered to the heart of the Church with as much pity and care as the penitent or the mourner, have been scorned and cursed and driven

[1] *The New Evangelism*, pp. 191–3.

away. But, as the more accurate, if less familiar, rendering has it, *He that is wise winneth souls.* Souls have to be won, and wisdom is needed to win them. Have the physicians of the soul less need to know than the physicians of the body? If the progress of medical science has put out of date the untrained midwife of bygone days, shall the Christian Church be any longer content to commit her most delicate and difficult work to the clumsy hands of the ignorant? It is idle to point to the successes of the unskilled practitioner: the most worthless patent medicine on the market can produce its little sheaf of testimonials. What we have to remember is the multitude who need, whom ignorance by its uncouth methods may easily alienate and repel, but whose needs it can never meet. We must not, indeed, exaggerate the worth of any worker's power or skill. Whenever souls are won there is always another Agent at work, besides the human agent; and it is marvellous to behold

what great things He can do even with the most imperfect tools. The poor words we speak with stammering lips may be the thin wire along which is borne to some receptive soul the very word of God Himself. Yet these things in no way lessen our responsibility to bring our best into the service of God and man; and that service demands always not zeal only but knowledge also, and not least the knowledge of men. As the physician studies the body, and the educationalist the mind, each seeking to perfect himself in the laws of physical and mental life, so must he to whom is committed the care of souls give all diligence to show himself a workman that needeth not to be ashamed. In one word, we must study the patient. It is time to put away our crude empiricism, our clumsy surgery, and to be no longer mechanics only but artists. It is your business, John Wesley used to say to his helpers, to save as many souls as you can; and to that end, he went on, you will need all the sense you have,

and to have all your wits about you. Only as the Church hears and obeys this message to-day can she hope that her words will be for the healing of the nations.

PRESENT-DAY PREACHING AND CONVERSION

VI

PRESENT-DAY PREACHING AND CONVERSION

THE subjects of the foregoing lectures appeal to all who love Jesus Christ and look for the coming of His kingdom among men. In this closing lecture I speak more directly to my brethren in the ministry. I have no new things to say to them; I do not pretend to have seen anything which they have not seen, and seen with clearer eyes than mine. Nevertheless, I make bold to speak to them, and for this reason, that among all the books and addresses on preaching which I have read or heard, I do not remember one in which, given simplicity and sincerity in the writer or speaker, there was not something that spoke directly to my own heart. And, in any case, I could not have

undertaken to speak on the subject of conversion at all, unless I had also felt free to draw out some of its implications for those who, like myself, are engaged in the work of preaching the gospel. What follows may be wholly commonplace; but after all, the commonplace is the preacher's staple commodity, the vivifying of the commonplace his great business. It is for him to bring back the blood to those poor pale ghosts we call our beliefs, that they may lay on us warm compelling hands of life and power. The important question, therefore, concerning what is urged in this lecture, is not whether it is new, but whether it is vital; if it is not, it is only so much dead lumber; if it is, it may vitalize.

First of all, then, let us remind ourselves that conversion is the great end of preaching. "Your business," said Wesley, "is not to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that Society, but to save as many souls as you can." This is a great saying, and, provided it be not too narrowly interpreted, it is worthy of all acceptation. But all converts do not register themselves in an inquiry-room at the close of a Sunday evening service, nor are the methods of the revivalist the only means by which men may be saved. Indeed, in this matter, all methods are wholly secondary. The first question for the preacher, like the first question in the old Scottish Shorter Catechism, is concerned wholly and solely with "the chief end": what am I here for? Till

that is settled nothing is settled; when that is settled other things settle themselves. *To this end was I born, and to this end came I into the world, that by all means I might save some*—when that conviction burns like a fire in a man's soul, we may safely leave him to himself and to God. "The Salvation of the Hearer the Motive of the Preacher" is the title of one of Newman's famous sermons, and when that thought guides the preacher's pen as he sits down to the preparation of his sermon, and moves his lips as he stands up to deliver it, he will need little instruction about methods; he has seen the true goal; he will not miss the way thither.

We must take care not to confuse the real question with other questions superficially akin to it, but essentially distinct from it. In all great centres of population throughout the English-speaking world to-day the Christian Churches are anxiously pondering the problem of the non-church-going multitudes around them, through whose indifference and

alienation they seem powerless to break. And no one, with even the smallest knowledge of the facts, can hide from himself either the urgency or the magnitude of the problem. After all, whatever our preaching may be, it can do nothing for those who are not there to listen to it. Nevertheless, when we have got the crowd—and experience shows that with a little sanctified ingenuity and daring the crowd can be got—the question still remains: what are we going to do with it? The great French preacher Ravignan said once to Lacordaire, "I hear that you had such a crowd at your last sermon that the people were sitting even on the top of the confessionals." "Ah, perhaps," said the other; "but you manage to make them go *into* the confessionals." There is the supreme task of the preacher—not simply to attract, but to convince and to convert. There must be hooks and stings in the word so that it cannot be shaken off. The message is not meant to be admired but to do something. Men are

sinners, and we must summon them to repentance ; they are prodigals, and we must call them home ; they are aliens, and we must persuade them to put away their enmity and be at peace with God : our preaching must do these things. As Lacordaire would say, it must get men not merely into the church but into the confessional. It has been said of Spurgeon that when he preached he always remembered that hearts might be changed for ever as the words were uttered. Hugh Price Hughes, who, though he did not belong to the same order of preachers as Spurgeon, was nevertheless one of the most effective preachers who ever stood in a Christian pulpit, always used to declare that a preacher is, first of all, neither an expositor nor a teacher, but an advocate : his congregation is the jury from whom it is his business to win an individual and immediate verdict for Christ. As a complete theory of the art of preaching doubtless this leaves something to be desired. But this at least may be said for it ; it keeps the

end to be sought steadily in view; it may not always choose the best possible route, but *it gets us there.* Now the trouble with much modern preaching, to speak quite frankly, is that it forgets what it is meant to do. It is interested in its own methods and processes; it prizes and perfects them for their own sake; and so, while it makes many pleasant excursions, and leads us into many by-paths of delight, yet, since it has forgotten the goal, it never arrives.

A keen and sympathetic observer of the religious life of England, and himself a distinguished Free Churchman, declared a few years ago that, so far as his experience went, evangelical preachers in the Free Churches had practically ceased to pray for the unconverted or to plead with them. We have had volumes on preaching of recent years full of ripe wisdom and good counsel, but completely ignoring the problems of the evangelist; for anything they say to the contrary, a preacher's first and last and only business might be with those who

have already surrendered themselves to Christ. And who has not heard—nay, who among us has not at some time or other caught himself making—the distinction between a "sermon" for which no sweat of brain and heart is too great, and a "simple evangelistic address," which, with the help of a few anecdotes, may be put together in half an hour? A "simple evangelistic address" indeed! As if the simple evangel were not the preacher's supreme concern! As if to preach the gospel of the love of God in Jesus Christ, and so to preach it that men shall commit themselves to it, were not a work to task a man's best strength and drain his very life-blood! "We were well pleased to impart unto you," wrote St. Paul, "not the gospel of God only, *but also our own souls*": [1] the whole man, brain and heart, was in and with the message. What, one wonders, would the Apostle have thought about our

[1] 1 Thess. ii. 8.

"simple evangelistic addresses"? It is preaching such as his which tells; and it tells because it costs.

Nor is it in the pulpit only that we need the rediscovery and full restoration of the evangelistic ideal. The whole Church has need to read again its great commission: "Go, make disciples of all the nations." The first duty—not the whole, but the first duty—of the Church is the duty of evangelization. Its chief end is, like its Master and Lord, to seek and to save that which is lost; and however it may excel as a social club or as an ethical school, if it fails in this it has missed its chief calling. The intellect must be trained, the conscience enlightened, the character built up, and all this is part of the Church's proper work; but it is all subsequent and subordinate to the work of saving the lost. "Our business," Hugh Price Hughes used to say, "is not to coddle the saints, but to collar the sinners." The language is distinctly un-canonical—unpardon-

ably so, some may think—but the saying has the root of the matter in it, none the less. We have no right to underrate the importance of preaching to the converted ; the complaint —the wholly just complaint, I believe—is that they get so much more than their share. Let any one look round among our Churches to-day, and say if everywhere there is not a call for a more earnest and persistent endeavour, the meaning of which could not be misunderstood even by the most prejudiced and unbelieving, to bring in "the outsider"; and for a ministry aflame with apostolic zeal to save. "Christianity," says the author of *Ecce Homo*, "would sacrifice its divinity if it abandoned its missionary character and became a mere educational institution. Surely this Article of Conversion is the true *articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiæ*. When the power of reclaiming the lost dies out of the Church, it ceases to be the Church. It may remain a useful institution, though it is most likely to become an immoral and mischievous one.

Where the power remains, there, whatever is wanting, it may still be said that 'the tabernacle of God is with men.'" [1]

[1] *Ecce Homo*, chap. xxi.

II

The supreme work of the preacher is the work of winning men for God: this is the first article in the preacher's working creed. And the second is like unto it: all men can be won. We must believe in the recoverability of man at his worst. When we declare, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," it must be with no kind of reserves. To falter here will be to find our sword-arm wither when we are in the hottest of the fight. Unless we can be sure that we have a gospel for everybody we can never be sure that we have a gospel for anybody.

Now, this is a faith which, if it is to be kept, will have to be fought for. There is a drift of thought, and a still stronger drift of fact, which makes steadily against it. The undoubted truths of heredity are being empha-

sized and magnified, to the exclusion of almost all other truths. Doctrines of man and of man's responsibility are in the air and in our current literature which, if we receive them, mean the drugging and stupefying of the soul. It is not the reality of sin men doubt to-day so much as its remedy. When we find a writer like Mr. John Morley gravely rebuking Emerson because he makes so little of "that horrid burden and impediment on the soul which the Churches call sin, and which, by whatever name we call it, is a very real catastrophe in the moral nature of man," [1] it has perhaps almost ceased to be necessary for Christian teachers any longer to protest that what they call sin is no invention of theology but one of the most sternly real facts of human experience. The pity of it is that this deepening consciousness of the reality of moral evil is, in so many minds, tinged with despair. The grievous hurt of mankind none can deny; but where, men ask,

[1] Essay on Emerson, *Miscellanies*, vol. i.

can healing be found? The world is sick and, alas! its sickness is unto death. The despair may voice itself in the blunt denials of agnosticism—"there is no substitute for a good heart, and no remedy for a bad one,"[1]—or in the musical quatrains of pessimism:

> And that inverted Bowl they call the sky,
> Whereunder crawling, coop'd, we live and die·
> Lift not your hands to *It* for help—for It
> As impotently moves as you or I;

—in either case it means that there is no gospel for the bad man. And the edge of this doctrine of despair sometimes rests even on the Christian Church, and darkens the minds of Christian men. We set limits to the grace of God both in our own lives and in the lives of others. There are our besetting sins, e.g., our rough manners, our quick temper, our sullen gloom—we are sometimes sorry for them, but they are too old to be cured now, we think; we must put up with them as best we can. And as for the godless multitudes that swarm in our great towns and

[1] *The Service of Man*, by J. Cotter Morison, p. 216.

cities—the thriftless, the drunken, the unclean—what else is there to hope for but their gradual extinction before the onward march of a better social order? Damned before they were born, their lives mortgaged to the devil before the title deeds were put into their own hands—who can do anything for these? So the question is urged, and sometimes faith is sorely put to it to find an answer. Yet an answer must be found, and found by the preacher, for it is that for which and by which he lives which is at stake. When men talk about necessary sins or hopeless classes, like Christian he must put his fingers in his ears and flee; for him to make such language his would be to surrender the very citadel of his faith, and to make the grace of God of none effect.

How, then, shall we keep our feet out of the fatalistic net? It will mean much for us to wait continually on the ministry of our evangelical Greathearts, and mark the sublime confidence with which, linking together

the depths and the heights, never forgetting that it is for the sake of the depths that the heights have been revealed, they proclaim the whole gospel to all men. "Though thou hast raked in the very kennels of hell," cries Spurgeon, "yet if thou wilt come to Christ and ask mercy, He will absolve thee from all sin." And through all the forty years of his unparalleled apostolate that note of holy daring is never silent. Or, open Wesley's *Journals*; almost any page will do, for every page is "bordered with a pale edge of fire—the spiritual passion of the great apostle's soul." "The next day" [Monday, Sept. 18, 1738], he writes, "I went to the condemned felons in Newgate and offered them free salvation." "Full seldom," we have been told—

> Full seldom doth a man repent, or use
> Both grace and will to pick the vicious quitch
> Of blood and custom wholly out of him,
> And make all clean, and plant himself afresh.

But not "full seldom," full often, had Wesley seen divine grace and human will join hands

and " make all clean " ; why, then, should he despair even of condemned felons in a Newgate cell ?

But it is to the New Testament we turn to take the band from off our heart and bid us breathe free. In all that wonderful book there is nothing more wonderful than its calm sense of power in the presence of the worst evils of the world. It saw them in all their dread might, and steadfastly refused to bow to them ; on the contrary, it made a show of them openly and triumphed over them in Christ. Its great word, its one theme, is salvation ; and salvation means healing—healing for the grievous hurts of sin. It is surely significant that the first mention of sin in the New Testament is in a prophecy of its destruction : " Thou shalt call his name Jesus ; for it is He that shall save His people from their sins." The writers of the New Testament know nothing either of necessary sins or of hopeless classes. There is no ugly twist in the soul which the grace of God can-

not straighten out; there are no men and women so far gone that it is vain to seek to do anything for them. Christ does not get rid of "difficult cases" by sending them to the incurable ward; in the great hospital of ailing souls "Despairing of none!" is the motto alike of the Physician Himself and of all who serve under Him. *The least—the last—the lost:* some one has pointed out how often these three words were on the lips of Jesus, and always those of whom they speak upon His heart.[1] What can He do for them? In one of our English cathedrals is a window which is the cathedral's chief glory and pride. It was the work of a youth, and made, it is said, from gathered pieces of glass which the window artist of the cathedral had rejected. And this is the miracle of Jesus; this is what He does with the world's poor leavings: He makes the least to be greatest, and the last to be

[1] I owe this reference and the illustration which follows to a sermon preached in Edinburgh some years ago by Rev. C. S. Horne.

the first, and the lost to be found. *We preach, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ.*

III

That men can be won, that the work of preaching is the work of winning men : these are the first principles of the preacher's faith. But once again it must be insisted that identity of aim does not necessarily involve identity of method. We must expect to find men as loyal as ourselves to the supreme ends of the Christian ministry, who yet doubt the expediency, or even the legitimacy, of methods of work which we adopt without hesitation. No unprejudiced observer will question the part, the really serviceable part, that revivals have played in the past history of the Church. Nor is there any good reason to suppose that the day of the revival is over. A distinguished American professor published a few years ago a very interesting volume in which he spoke of revivalism as though it were a

spent wave. "The strength of the old-time revival lay largely in the forces of which social psychology takes cognizance. It moved men in masses, stirring a whole congregation, a whole city, a whole state at once." Nothing of that kind happens now, he said: the revival and with it the revival type of conversion are perceptibly on the wane.[1] The ink on the printed page was scarcely dry when the great Revival broke out in Wales; so little can even the wisest among us forecast through what channels the life-giving waters will pour themselves. That revivals in the future will have their own distinguishing characteristics, and that these will not simply reproduce the characteristics of past revivals, is only what history and experience would lead us to expect. With no less confidence may we anticipate that so long as human nature remains what it is, so long will there be those who can most effectively aid their fellows through the special agency of a revival,

[1] Coe's *Religion of a Mature Mind*, p. 264.

so long will there be those for whom the day of revival will be the day of their visitation from on high. These things are manifest ; to refuse to see and say them is to show oneself wilfully blind to the Spirit's work among men. But not less plainly must it be said that these are not the only signs of His presence. Only a small minority of the disciples of Christ, it has been said, have entered upon the Christian life through the door of revival agencies.[1] We need concern ourselves about no arithmetical proportion in admitting in general the truth of the claim which lies behind statements of this kind. The fact to be recognized is the existence of multitudes to whom all our "special services" and huge "evangelistic campaigns," no matter how carefully they may be organized, or how enthusiastically they may be carried through, are nothing and less than nothing. We have done great things by these means in the past, and we shall do great things by them again in the

[1] Coe's *Religion of a Mature Mind*, p. 262.

future, but if we imagine that in them lies the solution of the whole problem of evangelization we are living in a fool's paradise.

As these lines were being written two kindred statements from opposite sides of the Atlantic came together into my hands. "In all lines of attempts to stir public interest," says the President of an American College, "there is a growing feeling that the immense convention has been rather overdone. The aim now is, rather, thoroughly to enlist a much smaller number of strong thoughtful men and work out upon the community through them." An experienced English journalist and politician reads the situation at home in precisely the same way. How, he asks, must the supporters of a fiercely controverted measure, at this moment before the House of Commons, secure victory for their cause? Not, he says, by passing resolutions, or making speeches to huge and already convinced audiences, but "by small meetings in the open air, or by talking to indi-

viduals or small groups of twos and threes." This is the method of Christian work for which Henry Drummond so earnestly pleaded. We must recover our faith in the individual; the art of dealing with him must be re-learned. "Every atom in the universe can act on every other atom, but only through the atom next it." *Jesus findeth Philip.* What is the next thing we read about Philip? *Philip findeth Nathanael.* It was so at the beginning, it must be so again, it must be so always, if the kingdom of heaven is ever to prevail.

In all these matters Christian men must cultivate a wise tolerance. It is not necessary that we adopt each other's methods; it is necessary that we do not judge each other. The scorn of other men's labours into which we sometimes suffer ourselves to be betrayed is a sin against the gospel which we preach. It is time for the pastor and the evangelist to understand and appreciate each other. The old taunts of "Sensation!" on the one side,

and "Stagnation!" on the other, must be buried for ever. We are all called by all means to save some. "Means," which do really "save," need no other justification; they may not be such as we can use; but they may save some whom our means will never reach; and therein let us rejoice.

IV

All things to all men: but this is by no means the only apostolic word for the guidance of the preacher in his work of winning men. "It pleased God," St. Paul says, "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." [1] I quote the words in the familiar but misleading rendering of the Authorized Version. The Revised Version has "the foolishness of the preaching," —a translation which may put us on our guard against the misconception of the earlier rendering, but which is not, it is to be feared, very intelligible in itself. Yet the Apostle's words are wholly without ambiguity, however difficult they may be to translate without the aid of a paraphrase: "It pleased God," he says, "by the folly (as the wise world calls

[1] 1 Cor. i. 21.

it) of the message proclaimed,[1] to save them that believe." In other words, men are to be saved by the word of the gospel, by the preaching of Christ—His life and His death, all that He was and all that He is. To be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth are, for St. Paul, only different ways of saying the same thing.

Statements such as these, then, define and limit the kind of truth with which the preacher has to do. Truth is of various kinds —mathematical, scientific, economic; but the truth with which he is concerned is saving truth, the truth of the gospel, truth "as truth is in Jesus." "I long to see you," Paul told the Romans, "that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift."[2] I do not suggest that this is a complete definition of the aims of the Christian ministry; I would be the last to seek to rule out everything that does not

[1] κήρυγμα, which means not the act of preaching (κήρυξις), but the message proclaimed. See Findlay on 1 Corinthians in *The Expositor's Greek Testament.*

[2] Romans i. 11.

come within the four walls of a single text. Nevertheless, if we acknowledge the authority of the New Testament at all, we must admit that the teaching of saving truth, the imparting of spiritual gifts, is the great end of preaching. "Thou art a minister of the word," wrote William Perkins beside his name on all his books, "mind thy business." [1]

Are we preachers to-day minding our business? We are doing many things; are we doing, as we might and as we ought, the one thing for the sake of which we are what we are and where we are? It is not, I hope, an uncharitable thing to say, that, speaking generally, the preacher who can do anything else better than he can preach is in his wrong place; he ought to be doing that other thing which he can do better. One of our English religious newspapers, a short time ago, had

[1] For a brief account of this Puritan divine, see Dr. John Brown's *Puritan Preaching in England*, pp. 71–83.

the following reference to a minister who had just been settled in a new charge: "Mr. —— is one of the best political speakers in England, . . . but he is also an excellent preacher, and his ministry at —— promises to be very helpful and influential." The intention of the writer was obvious; but a more left-handed kind of compliment it would be difficult to conceive. It reminds one of Gibbon's account of the Emperor Gallienus: "He was a master of several curious but useless sciences, a ready orator, an elegant poet, a skilful gardener, an excellent cook, and a most contemptible prince." [1] But men such as these, who win the first prizes in other men's departments and are only third-rate men in their own, be they preachers or princes, have plainly missed their way. And, perhaps, there is no one whom we may more justly pity than the minister of the gospel who is famous for his schemes or his books or his politics or for anything that is his, but in

[1] *Decline and Fall*, chap. x.

whose ministry the hungry can find no food, and the sorrowing no comfort.

Look at the question from another point of view. Can any one glance over the Church advertisements in the Press of any of our great cities to-day without feeling that the Apostle's principle of "all things to all men" is being strained to the breaking point? We can all understand and sympathize with the motives which lie behind these things. Earnest men feel that they must do something, that indeed they ought to do anything, that will sting and startle the multitudes out of their indifference. But in our eagerness to get a hearing for the gospel, let us not forget that it is the gospel for which a hearing is to be got. Newspaper topics, questions of the hour and such like, may on occasion serve some useful end; they may help, like the ringing of a bell, to gather the crowd; but there is nothing that people tire of much sooner than the sound of a bell, and unless the bellman has something to say,

the crowd will soon scatter again. "Our preachers," wrote Dr. Tholuck once from Germany to Dr. Pusey, "having got rid of the Christian doctrines, are now insisting with much earnestness upon the importance of taking regular exercise." [1] From very different motives some among us are repeating to-day the same tragic blunder. But does any sane man seriously suppose that barren futilities of this kind can avail us aught? *It is not fit that we should forsake the word of God and serve tables.* Every one will remember John Ruskin's magnificent protest against the folly of the wasted hours we spend rummaging in the waste paper basket of literature, while the world's great masterpieces lie unopened: "Will you go and gossip with your housemaid or your stable boy when you may talk with queens and kings; or flatter yourself that it is with any worthy consciousness of your own claims to respect

[1] Quoted in Liddon's *Some Elements of Religion* p. 3.

that you jostle with the hungry and common crowd for *entree* here, and audience there, while all the while this eternal court is open to you, with its society, wide as the world, multitudinous as its days, the chosen and the mighty of every place and time?"[1] And shall we who are the ambassadors of Christ, whose high prerogative it is to speak to men of Him—the Incarnate Son, the Revealer of the Father, the Saviour of men—of life and death, of the soul and eternity, shall we turn aside to find our texts in the newspapers and to make our pulpit a sounding-board for the voices of the market-place and the street? Verily, not for those things was committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

And even from the point of view of gaining the ear of the crowd, it may turn out that some of our attempted short-cuts are really a longer way round than the old paths. I know nothing to give a man pause in this

[1] *Sesame and Lilies.*

matter like a study of John Wesley's texts as these are recorded in his *Journals*. The common people of England in the eighteenth century were ignorant and brutal to a degree of which to-day happily we have little experience. Yet from among these very people, speaking to them on subjects which led straight to the very heart of the Christian gospel, Wesley gathered in the open air, during a ministry of over fifty years, crowds such as perhaps have never waited on the words of any speaker. To do the work of an evangelist Wesley knew that it is more important to have a great theme than a novel theme. Do not the greatest and most fruitful ministries of our own time point the same lesson? Spurgeon in London, Alexander Maclaren in Manchester, Alexander Whyte in Edinburgh—to name but three examples—all bear witness to the power of a ministry which is built on the word of God to win and hold the ear of the multitude. "Sir, we would see Jesus": this

is still the demand which they who come up to worship make of the Lord's apostles ; if we cannot meet it the one reason for our apostleship is gone ; we have torn up our charter, we have forfeited our right to be. We may still go on discussing questions of the hour and feeding the souls of the hungry with little half-baked expositions of great social problems, but our work will be done, and it will not be long before the savourless salt cast forth of God is trodden under foot of men.

V

One other thing still is needful that our word may be made mighty to the winning of men for God. In all true preaching, Phillips Brooks has told us,[1] there are two essential elements—truth and personality; if either of these be wanting, what remains is not preaching. *We were well pleased to impart unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls*: this is what preaching meant to St. Paul; it must not mean less to us. Of the nature of the truth given to us to speak something has already been said; let my last word be concerning the preacher himself.

And what I would urge is that we should press into this holy service every gift of mind and of heart with which God has enriched us. It is the tragedy of so many lives that their

[1] *Lectures on Preaching*, p. 5.

daily calling makes no demand on the soul's best powers; if these are not to rust in them unused, other claims must intervene. But there is nothing that the preacher has or is that in his preaching he may not turn to account. Physical gifts, intellectual gifts, gifts of speech, the magnetism that draws men, the strength that moulds them—he may harness them all to the work of his life: they may all be his allies and helpers when he stands before men to speak to them of God.

The day has happily gone by—the wonder is that it ever should have been at all—when it is any longer necessary to insist that for the best work of an evangelist there must be the trained mind as well as the warmed heart.[1]

[1] It is a pleasure, in this connexion, to recall Henry Drummond's tribute to his friend Moody. In Whittier's *Life* there is the following reference to the great evangelist: "Moody and Sankey are busy in Boston. The papers give the discourses of Mr. Moody, which seem rather commonplace and poor, but the man is in earnest. . . . I hope he will do good, and believe that he will reach and move some that could not be touched by James Freeman Clarke or Phillips Brooks. I cannot accept his theology or part of it at least, and his methods

But are there not other gifts besides those of the intellect concerning the use of which in religious work some of us are still unreasonably shy? Two examples will illustrate my meaning. I remember speaking once with a Professor of the United Free Church of Scotland—a man of sane and well-balanced judgment—about Henry Drummond and his

are not to my taste. But if he can make the drunkard, the gambler and the debauchee into decent men, and make the lot of their weariful wives and children less bitter, I bid him Godspeed." These words, wrote Drummond, "are broad, large-hearted, even kind. But they are not the right words. They are the stereotyped charities which sweet natures apply to anything not absolutely harmful, and contain no more impression of the tremendous intellectual and moral force of *the man behind* than if the reference were to the obscurest Salvation Army zealot. I shall not endorse, for it could only give offence, the remark of a certain author of world-wide repute when he read the words: 'Moody! why, he could have put half a dozen Whittiers in his pocket, and they would never have been noticed'; but I shall endorse, and with hearty good-will, a judgment which he further added. 'I have always held,' he said—and he is a man who has met every great contemporary thinker from Carlyle downward—'that in sheer brain-size, in the mere raw material of intellect, Moody stands among the first three or four great men I have ever known

remarkable work among the Edinburgh students. "Drummond," he said, "simply charmed men into the Kingdom. When he spoke he cast such a spell about some that for the time they seemed half-dazed; when they recovered it was to find themselves within the Kingdom. But," he added seriously, "there was no mistake about it; *they were there*!" There is of course a touch of purposeful exaggeration in the description which will deceive nobody, but it does undoubtedly point to one secret, on the human side, of Drummond's marvellous success as an evangelist. My second example is the late Hugh Price Hughes. Mr. Hughes possessed in an extraordinary degree that quality of masterfulness, that power to impose one's own will on others, which always marks out the born leader of men. I have seen him, almost by the sheer might of his own right arm, bring a hostile assembly clean round to his own way of thinking. And when he preached he drew without stint on this great power of

moulding men. Are we to conclude, then, as men sometimes did, that the visible results which followed his evangelistic appeals were simply another example of the way in which his imperious personality dominated wills weaker than his own? I do not see that, either in the case of Drummond or of Hughes, we are shut up to any such conclusion. If the Spirit of God could come upon, or (as the literal meaning is) could "clothe itself with" a Gideon or a Zechariah,[1] with the much learning of a Paul or the eloquence of an Apollos, why not also with the magnetism of a Drummond, or the masterfulness of a Hughes? That in all such cases there is danger lest the work should be of man rather than of God, and so should come to nought, is true; but the danger is always there whenever God works through men. In no case does the reality of a conversion depend on the nature of the human agency by which it is

[1] See Judges vi. 34; 2 Chron. xxiv. 20 (R.V. marg.).

effected; that can be determined only by the fruits which follow. Apply this test to the work of men like Drummond or Hughes, and the serviceableness of their own peculiar gifts needs no demonstration. For ourselves the lesson is plain; we must lay in God's hand all that is ours, for who can tell with what unworthy human powers the divine Spirit may elect to clothe itself?

But, above all, for the work of winning men we need a rebirth of spiritual passion. Some one has pointed out the striking contrast between the dominant interest with which St. Paul says "I must see Rome," and that which the words would ordinarily reveal. The Apostle was eager to visit the Imperial City only because he was eager to preach there also the gospel of Christ. Every other ambition of his life had passed into this. All the waters of his soul had gathered themselves into one mighty flood to be poured through the narrows of this single purpose: "To preach unto the Gen-

tiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." The urgency of his message burned like a fire in his bones; his passion to win men was a divine constraint which gave him no rest. "By the space of three years," he told the Ephesian elders, "I ceased not to admonish every one night and day with tears." When his friends, foreseeing danger and death, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem, "What do ye," he said, "weeping and breaking my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And above all, when he thought of his brethren, his kinsmen after the flesh, his heart's desire and supplication to God for them was that they might be saved; nay, he was even ready for their sakes to wish himself anathema from Christ.[1]

There is something in a passion like this which subdues and awes us; and is this not the very heart of preaching? "The voice

[1] This paragraph is taken from my *Memoranda Paulina*, p. 154.

said, Cry." Men do not listen because we do not cry; we are ineffectual because we are cold; we do not move because we are not greatly moved. "We may not have lost the message and yet we may have lost the right way of delivering it. It would be possible so to read or to speak even a great or true doctrine that not a soul would believe a word you said. The first business is the Cry. No man goes about the streets whispering 'Fire! Fire! Fire!' he would be passed by with a smile as an innocent lunatic." Surely of all vain and helpless things in this sublunary world the take-it-or-leave-it kind of preaching—the preaching that does not urge and press its message upon men—can have the least to say for itself. We are not lecturers, seeking to please or instruct; we are preachers, whose business is to convince and persuade; and we cannot afford, when we ought to be girding ourselves for a resolute grapple with the conscience and the will, to let the sermon dribble out in a neat

epigram or an eloquent peroration. The picture which Christian saw in the Interpreter's house should hang on the walls of every preacher's study ; and this was the fashion of it : " It had eyes uplift to Heaven, the best of Books in his hand, the law of truth was written upon his lips, the world was behind his back ; it stood as if it pleaded with men, and a crown of gold did hang over its head." *It stood as if it pleaded with men* ; and the Church's great revival will come when on the lips of all her ministers is heard once more the great apostolic note of appeal, *We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God.*

Butler and Tanner, The Selwood Printing Works, Frome, and London